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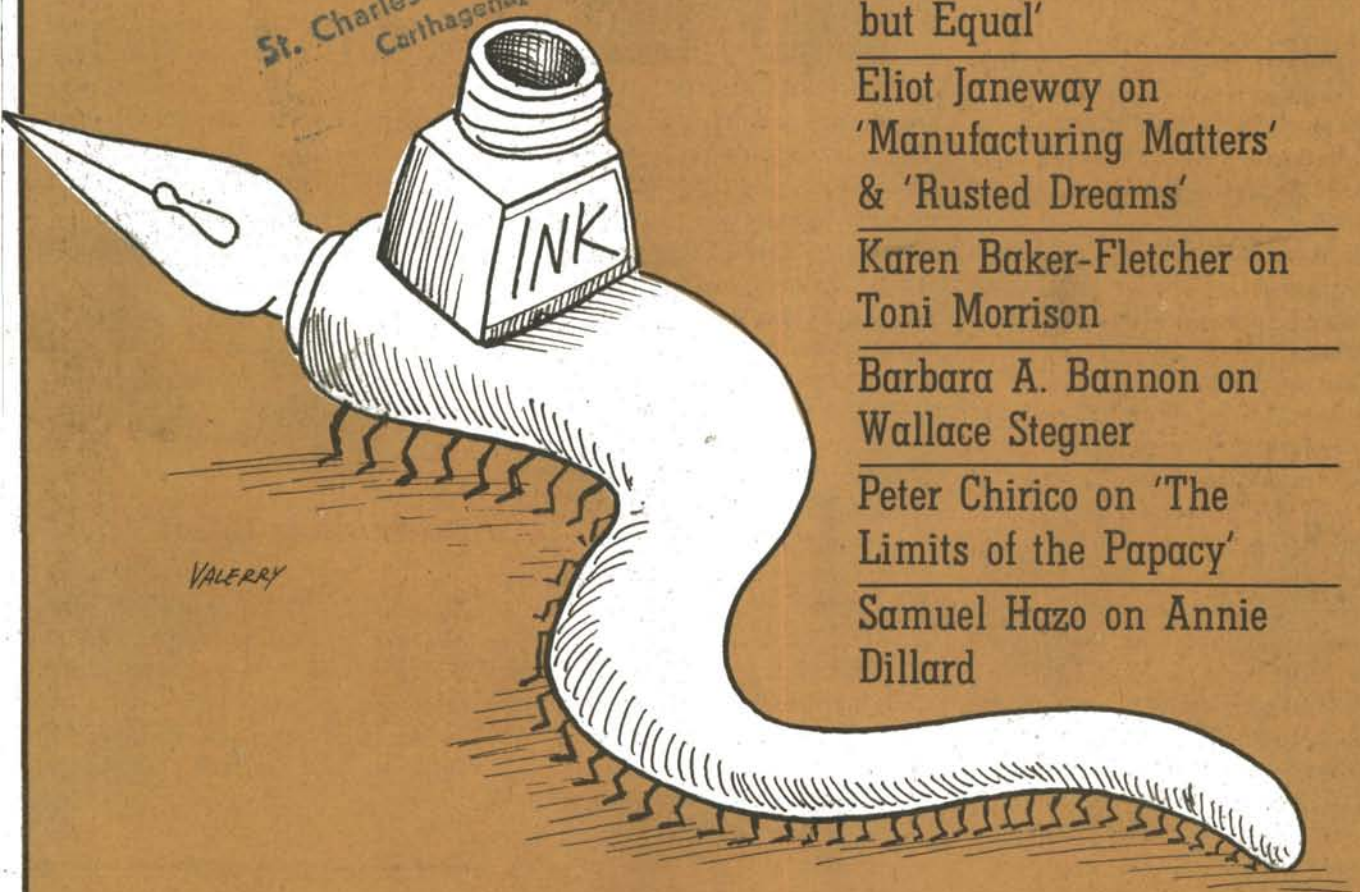


Jim Sleeper on 'The Truly Disadvantaged' & 'Plural but Equal'

Eliot Janeway on 'Manufacturing Matters' & 'Rusted Dreams'

Karen Baker-Fletcher on Toni Morrison

Barbara A. Bannon on Wallace Stegner

Peter Chirico on 'The Limits of the Papacy'

Samuel Hazo on Annie Dillard

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## FALL BOOKS

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## Thanks & no thanks

New York, N.Y.

*To the Editors:* Some praise and a complaint:

Thank you for the discussion of the morality of a policy of deterrence. I was particularly struck by the succinctness of Nicholas Rosa's letter in September 25 issue.

Thank you for recognizing out loud that Reagan deserves impeachment. We might not have suffered Irangate — or even Reagan — had the Watergate caper come to its logical conclusion: the impeachment of Nixon.

Thank you for the articles on Bork in the September 11 issue, articles generating more light than heat on both sides of the issue.

The complaint:

Andrew Greeley in his role as sociologist has said pertinent and useful things about Catholicism in America, and he might be worth listening to on theology in general, but his notions of sexual satisfaction — both male and female, I dare say — come, as do his fictional techniques and his fictional style, from bestselling tripe. He obviously takes his novels quite seriously, but need *Commonweal* nourish his illusions by devoting so large a hunk of its single August issue to refuting him?

MARIAN BURKHART

## Dancing in circles

Philadelphia, Pa.

*To the Editors:* I know of no other subject which causes such an irrational and heated response as homosexuality, unless it is the subject of giving money to the church. I have a priest friend who, contrary to common opinion about never mentioning religion, politics, sex or money, says that as far as he is concerned, these are the only four things worth talking about. And as an Anglican, I probably ought not to be talking at all in a Roman Catholic publication, and wouldn't if it were not for the fact that my own church exhibits an equal amount of ambiguity and ecclesiastical dancing in circles when it comes to homosexuality and the priesthood.

The whole subject may be enjoying far more importance than it deserves only because of what we are making of it. This seems to be amply demonstrated in the letters [Sept. 11] sent in reply to Richard McBrien's article ["Homosexuality & the Priesthood," June 19]. And the good archbishop's letter reads as if it had been written in the nineteenth century. All churches are going to have to face this question honestly and rationally with a minimum of emotional gut reaction, for it will not simply go away. As it is, gay clergy are being forced to lead double lives, which is, in the long run, extremely destructive behavior.

There appears to be a shared fundamentalism between Protestants and Catholics when it comes to the possibility of ongoing revelation by the Holy Spirit. For the one group, the Spirit stopped acting between the New Testament and the Reformation; for the other, along about the fourth-century. One can only hope that in the face of this issue, and many others as well, the Holy Spirit will be given half a chance to speak, and above all, to be heard.

THE REVEREND MICHAEL R. BECKER

## I stand in awe

Washington, D.C.

*To the Editors:* Although she would probably resist the description, Rosemarie Brickley ["God Isn't Finished with Me Yet," July 17] clearly demonstrates one of the most exciting and promising developments in today's church, the spiritual awakening and maturation of the "ordinary" lay person, a development which has received scant attention in the relatively fruitless debates about the "proper" roles of clergy and laity.

With clever wit and insight, Brickley has dramatized the centrality of one's relationship to God and the tension inherent in trying to live out the implications of that relationship in the concrete decisions and circumstances of daily life and work. Most importantly, she has discovered her own unique way of discerning "the ways in which God chooses to act in and through the human."

As director of Georgetown University's Theological Certificate Program, I continually stand in awe at what God is doing for and with the people with whom I have the privilege of working. Rosemarie Brickley is a perfect example of these people, spiritually alive and facing up to the challenges and difficulties of being the Lord's active presence in today's world. Let us hope that the bishops gathered in synod attend to the lived experiences of lay people like Rosemarie Brickley.

ANTHONY T. MOORE

## Newman & Hillel

Philadelphia, Pa.

*To the Editors:* Referring to what I imagine were her days at Harvard, Maura Moynihan writes ["Out of India: Karma & Christ," August 14], "We Catholics on the block never had anything like Hillel House." In fact, Catholics at

*(Continued on page 639)*

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COMMONWEAL

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# After the fall

Despite the sudden collapse and subsequent writhings of the stock market, the American economy is fundamentally sound. That, at least, has been the view expressed by numerous officials and economic seers, starting with Mr. Reagan. It is unclear whether they really believe what they are saying or whether they are saying it out of a felt duty not to make things worse. In any case, it is nonsense.

Yes, you can find good grounds for arguing that the collapse of the economy need not follow upon the collapse of the bull market. Even in 1929 the one didn't immediately follow upon the other. At present, the U.S. economy is still growing (third quarter GNP: 3.8 percent, up from 2.5 percent in the second quarter); inflation is low and, if anything, declining; business investment and employment are holding; corporate profits and personal income are up. Compared to the stock market, then, the economy itself is healthy—like someone with walking pneumonia compared to the person in intensive care.

The truth is that *fundamentally* the economy is *not* healthy. It is an economy consuming more than it is producing and making up the difference in debt. The speed and extent of this development are breathtaking. In 1980 America was the world's largest creditor nation, today it's the world's largest debtor. This flow of funds is said to reflect confidence in the American economy, and this is true to a degree. That the U.S. could go bankrupt strikes many investors as among the least likely of possible catastrophes. But the flow also testifies to nothing more reassuring than Americans' blithe willingness to borrow (and pay the requibbsite interest) and others' willingness to save (and look for the best return on their surplus funds). Growth in American productivity, already weak when this decade began, has grown weaker still. That follows naturally enough on the decline of our private domestic investment to its weakest level in the postwar era—exactly the opposite of what the Reagan "supply- side" revolution was supposed to produce. Public capital investment has been equally low: in the early eighties, federal, state, and local governments have been spending only a sixth of the percentage of GNP that they spent in the late sixties to maintain necessities like roads, bridges, and sewers. The fear that the nation's economic strength is crumbling is not just metaphor.

The United States is approaching the end of an extended period of growth. That growth, however, has been anything but spectacular, and it has been achieved by a kind of mutant Keynesianism that has piled up a mountain of debt as well as a mountain of weaponry. By priming the pump with deficits on the one hand while running the economy through a recession on the other hand, Reaganomics managed to wring out inflation and, eventually, to create employment, much of it low-paying but probably essential for absorbing millions of legal and illegal immigrants to these shores. Otherwise the last years of economic leadership have



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been wasted opportunity. The dramatic globalization of economic life, which has provided the funds for the deficit extravaganza and created the pressures to keep down wages, poses startling new challenges to economic policy we've hardly begun to face. (The running sore of third-world debt is part of this challenge—and another element of the fundamental shakiness of our economy.) Between the sheer size of our budget and trade deficits and the delicate interrelationships of the global economy, we have worked ourselves into a situation where the traditional tools for countering a downturn are likely to break in our hands.

It will soon be a year since the Catholic bishops issued their pastoral letter, *Economic Justic for All*, and that should remind us of the other ways in which this economy is not fundamentally sound. After five years of economic expansion, the nation has not managed to deal with so basic a problem as hunger. A new report from the Physician Task Force describes hunger as "epidemic" in America—"seemingly intractable" among the long-standing poor and now spreading to new groups. Homelessness is a national scandal. The security of home ownership and health care are slipping away from many wage-earners. Poverty and unemployment, though belatedly decreased, are poised to reach new heights when the expansion falters. The "underclass" persists despite recent growth (see the lead article by Jim Sleeper). The educational investment and human services essential to preparing another generation for productive roles in the economy have been shortchanged. And instead of prosperity fostering an attitude of generosity and responsibility, the eighties economy has been built on glitz, deals, and ruthless ambition contemptuous of traditional values. One Yuppie trader in his twenties welcomed the Great Crash because it knocked so many forty-year-olds off the corporate ladder above him. "For some of us," he explained delicately to the *Wall Street Journal*, "the real problem [was] the fleshy middle layer."

The public prints are filled with recipes for what is seen as the crucial next step, cutting the deficit. We have our favorite ingredients, too. Like the Democrats in Congress, we believe that the burden of tax hikes should fall on the well-to-do (e.g., buyers of second homes and luxury housing, inheritors of stock, and so on). Unlike both the Democrats and the president, we also think it's time for Social Security to be taxed, and government and military pensions to be brought into line. On the spending side, unnecessary military bases and gold-plating of weapons are targets of opportunity. Farm subsidies and an energy or gasoline tax are other subjects worthy of examination. Etc., etc. Balancing the books, however, is not the whole story. Sound *investment* in the nation's future cannot be delayed—in other words, new expenditures for child welfare, education, and infrastructure.

The hard work of piecing together a government initiative is essential. But even more essential is acknowledging the unpleasant truth. The stock market's recent turbulence is not simply a "correction." It is not even simply a dangerous consequence of new financial instruments and trading procedures that need to be regulated. Rather it is a symptom of an economy that is deeply awry.

## MEDIA & THE MESSAGE

Some of the TV spots are only ten seconds long. Others run up to sixty seconds. In all, twenty-nine different spot ads were sent free of charge to thousands of television and radio stations across the country last month, as part of the federal government's information campaign against AIDS.

"Which of these four people are living with AIDS?" a voice asks as the camera focuses close up on (1) an attractive Hispanic woman who says she is a Catholic, very involved in church, the mother of three beautiful children; (2) a young man who says he has finished school and has a good job; (3) a middle-aged writer/counselor with a Ph.D.; (4) a young mother of five who looks into the camera to say, "Because of them, I stopped using drugs." All four are Hispanic—one Hispanic gets AIDS every two hours; all four are living with AIDS; three have been diagnosed themselves; one is a mother whose son is dying.

The people appearing in these ads are good looking and articulate. They speak in their own words. We are shown no pictures of sick babies dying of AIDS, no Skid Row drug addicts or gay men in pain or out of their minds in hospital beds. Clearly, the ads have been designed to avoid the repellent, to humanize AIDS, to help people see the stake they have in AIDS regardless of their own risk level.

"If I, the son of a Baptist minister, living in a rural area can get AIDS, anybody can," says one blond young man. "Obviously women can get AIDS; I'm here to witness to that," says a middle-aged nurse once addicted to drugs.

While the three major television networks have already agreed to run some of these ads, controversies have kept them off some airways, to the detriment of the public.

One objection is to the ads' content, to the possibility that by mentioning or even implying extramarital sexual activity (one ad mentions men having sex with other men), or by calling for "protected" sex through condom use, for example, such activity is being legitimated, or suggested to an indiscriminate viewing audience which includes children.

Certainly this possibility exists, but the government has decided that the devastation of AIDS warrants the urgency and directness employed of these ads. As one voice-over insists, "there is no way to avoid talking about sexuality."

But how shall sexuality be talked about? Can't these ads say with candor that abstinence from all sexual intercourse outside of a monogamous marriage is not only morally right, but is the best prevention against AIDS? Why can't the ads be as unequivocal about unrestrained sexuality as they are about drug abuse: "Don't ever use IV drugs. . . . Not once. Not ever," says a young black woman, who adds, "and if you're sexually



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active, make sure. . . .'' It's the ''if'' and the lack of marital context that critics object to.

The government's problem is a familiar one. It is trying to pursue multiple, and somewhat conflicting, goals. One goal is to prevent the spread of AIDS. Another is to respect what social consensus exists on sexual behavior. A third is to prevent panic and to support those already afflicted with AIDS or the virus. At important points, these goals coincide. Abstinence and monogamy do prevent the spread of AIDS. A calm and decent attitude toward AIDS and its victims will counter the deception, denial, and bitterness that can drive AIDS out of the reach of public health efforts. But the goals are also in tension. Preaching only abstinence outside of monogamy will simply fail to move many of those most likely to spread the AIDS virus. Scare tactics can provoke hysteria — one family's house has been burned down in Florida — and discrimination against those with AIDS or at high risk of infection.

So the ads opt for striking a balance. We are told that unprotected sex is risky; condoms are not 100 percent safe; and we do have choices. Considering the information, isn't the best choice pretty obvious? Even so, since the nation will not declare a moratorium on some sexual activity and drug addiction will not be solved momentarily, isn't the government right to tell people the next best choices?

The truth is that the government's mix of goals reflects the public's mix. Not every ad manages the balancing act equally well. But there is no getting around the fact that any effective advertising campaign will have to strike a balance somewhere. These ads should be broadcast often and in prime time.

WOMEN-CHURCH

## 'CLAIMING OUR POWER'

DIALOGUE, WORSHIP, & DEVELOPMENT

At the same time the world's Catholic bishops gathered in Rome for this year's synod on the laity — where bishops from different lands and cultures have brought up the issue of women in the church's life — more than 2,500 women gathered in Cincinnati, October 9-11, for the annual Women-Church conference. The two events were not planned to coincide on theme, but one connection is obvious: Catholic women need the bishops to speak on their behalf only because women are not allowed to represent themselves. It is solely because so many women have persisted in their public call for equality in the church over the last few years that bishops are now espousing the case for equality in Rome. Of course, women are already representing themselves as church quite apart from the hierarchy, across racial and denominational lines.

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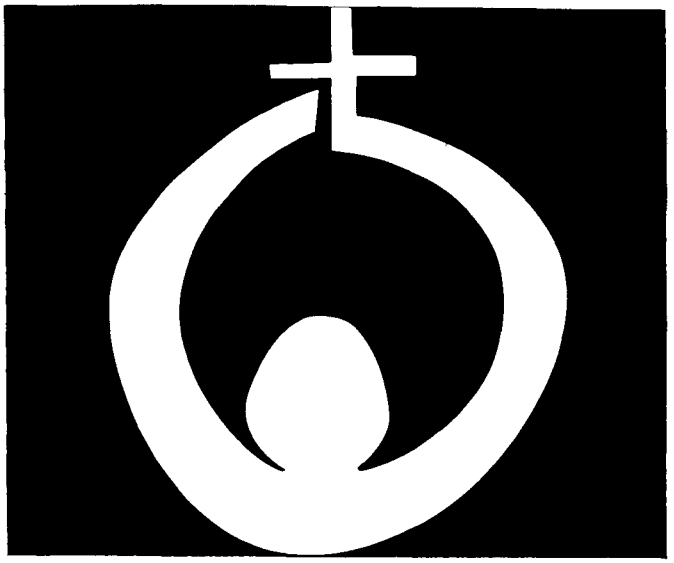

That is what Women-Church Convergence has been about since its inception in 1983. The Convergence is a coalition of twenty-five feminist organizations — including the Women's Ordination Conference, Quixote Center Convergence Taskforce, the Grail, Catholics for a Free Choice and a few other organizations housed in the same building in Chicago, plus several organizations of women religious — rooted in the Catholic tradition.

Because I was a college student in the late sixties/early seventies — saw Earth Day come and go, the war protests, a decade of civil rights marches — I am both wary of and attracted to a movement like Women-Church. Being among thousands of people assembled to hash out complicated problems incessantly for two or three days has never been an enjoyable experience for me. But in my ears ring the words of one of my former teachers, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, describing the early Christian faith: "It's a movement," she said, "so if you sit down, you're out of the movement."

I went to Cincinnati for this year's conference, "Women-Church: Claiming our Power," looking for partners with whom to build an inclusive model for the future church. Yet as someone who tends to take issue with at least one or another part of most given positions, I worried about what looked like a party-line liberal feminist agenda behind a program of workshops that ranged from "Lobbying the Catholic Church" to "Racism and the Bonding of Women"; from "Economic Development in Feminist Hands" to "Sexuality: Healthy, Good, and Holy"; from "We Are What We Sing" to "Lesbians Keeping Faith."

As it turned out, two sessions that focused on the issue of abortion (which I chose to attend) and the Saturday evening liturgy itself furnished the grist for my three-pronged reflection on openness, moral relativism, and Christian identity.

During the question and answer period of a focus session called "Abortion: Moral Perspectives," led by Marjorie Reilly Maguire, Pauline Nunez Morales, Patricia Camp, and Deborah Barrett, a flyer was passed out about the Justice Campaign. The Campaign calls on Congress to provide public funding for low-income women who have become pregnant through sexual assaults and who choose abortion.

Upon hearing this, a woman stood up and in a soft voice said she was a mother of five, pro-life, has herself lived in poverty, but "would die before I would kill one of my own." This Campaign, she said, would add to the exploitation of women. She had to repeat herself since half the roomful of women could not hear her, and in a louder voice than before, she restated her position. Every member of the panel responded briefly, taking this woman's views very seriously. It was a tense moment. Many of the women were pro-choice; the presenters were pro-choice; and the subject is a complex and debatable one. I saw no one in the room roll her eyes, snicker, become visibly angry, or huff with exasperation.

This incident set a certain tone which, I believe, enabled other women candidly to express their own views, hesitations, or to ask their questions publicly. Several women began with the statement, "I am confused on this subject. . . ." One woman who appeared to be in her twenties asked if there weren't some way to prevent abortion, especially since so many abortions are "repeats," a second, third, even a fourth abortion for the same woman. A middle-aged woman told the story of harassment she had witnessed of women trying to enter an abortion clinic. Which was followed by the testimony of another woman, identifying herself as pro-life, who described the kind of counseling she is involved in: giving information about alternatives to abortion — never using the word "murder" or pictures of aborted fetuses, etc. — and counseling women after they've had an abortion. "We won't walk them to the abortion clinic though," she said.

What startled and pleased me was how much respect, honesty, and real listening was going on in that room. I doubt anyone's opinion was changed one way or another, but the level and openness of discourse was remarkable, worthy of celebration.

I found myself wondering whether such a dialogue could have happened if there had been a significant number of men present, or at a pro-life meeting were pro-choice women to voice their views publicly. Perhaps.

What never was addressed adequately, in my view, and what the women's movement particularly needs to address is how to determine when abortion is moral or immoral once one grants that abortion may not *always* be evil.

This question came up during a session called "Faithful Dissent: Life After the *New York Times* Ad." It was led by four women religious who signed the 1984 ad calling for dialogue among Catholics on abortion, whose cases are still unsettled with the Vatican.

Unfortunately, Sister Patricia Hussey responded with an attitude disturbingly close to moral relativism — the kind of sentiment often expressed as "what's right for me," or "what's right for her," implying that any standard is impossible to frame. There were some irresponsible abortions, Hussey admitted. "But I wouldn't ever want to judge any woman . . ." Hussey said.

How is it that among those who justly demand recognition



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of women's moral agency and who cogently assert the immorality of patriarchal systems and institutions, there is such reticence to judge morality in the case of abortion? I am not speaking about casting a first stone, or about legal recourse, only about the distinctions and criteria that will sooner or later have to be articulated, and should be worked out by Christian feminists, for society's sake.

For me, Sister Theresa Kane's closing address on Sunday was a high point. She provided what had been missing in the Saturday evening liturgy, the only liturgy I was able to attend. That "worship service" had begun with the chanting of the words "I am holy." Not God, mind you, but "I," not even "we." It scarcely moved much beyond such sentiments. Doesn't the discipleship of equals require that we be following someONE? And to use bread and wine without any reference to Jesus the Christ, or at least to the Exodus and Passover, caused me confusion about what it was that we were doing. A friend later stated succinctly what was awry with the entire service: "It seemed to stress the immanent at the expense of the incarnate and transcendent." What did we mean by Women-*Church* after all? I regret I could not have participated in all of the liturgies in order to search the answer to this question more fully through worship.

But Kane's address set some of my worries in context. She proclaimed that ours is an inner, God-given authority; that our vision is the sacramental equality within human relationships; and that courage and peace must and do inspirit our vision. "No one has power over us except the one we call holy, the divine," she said, uninhibited to name the source of all power and holiness. We are "co-responsible with men for the direction of the twenty-first century, just twelve short years away," she said with appropriate urgency. Kane's was not a soft talk, acceptable to me because of her own personal humility or gentleness, though this was palpable and exemplary. It was Kane who said, "The core of courage is rage. . . . For each of us I pray for a passionate holy rage; a just anger in the face of injustice, not confused with hatred and hostility."

This identity of Women-Church as Kane described it will, I hope, hold up under the questions posed afterward by Gloria Steinem, who hinted without elaboration that the word "church" in Women-Church might make some women feel excluded. Steinem hoped that the rituals and liturgies expressed here, and new rituals yet to be devised, might be included at every women's meeting to help the "spiritually impaired." While new rituals can certainly be invented, as Steinem proposed, the misuse of symbols should not be continued.

In my view, to withdraw from the two-fold project that is Women-Church risks not only changing our identity, but leveling the distinct contributions we are making to the rest of the women's movement.

Finally, Steinem cautioned against martyrdom: "not to murder the God in us." But what exactly does that mean? To whom was it directed? To the *New York Times* ad signers who may be forced from their vowed communities? Or to those women who remain in the church with the hope of effecting growth toward full equality? Isn't this the under-belly of Kane's "rage" within courage? That rage can be self-destructive; it can murder the God within us, or at least weaken our responsiveness to those people who may not agree with us or who put obstacles in the way of goals we truly believe are right and holy.

Women-Church cannot afford to avoid developing moral distinctions nor to lose its identity as church. The discipleship of equals is what is at stake.

KAREN SUE SMITH

*Karen Sue Smith is an associate editor of* Commonweal.

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**OF SEVERAL MINDS** David R. Carlin, Jr.

# A SHORTSIGHTED VISION

## THE ABC'S OF SCHOOLING

One of the best in the long string of recent education reform reports came out in September: *American Memory*, by Lynne V. Cheney, who chairs the National Endowment for the Humanities. Cheney faults the nation's schools for an undue emphasis on what they are pleased to call "skills" combined with an undue neglect of academic content. "How can mental skills be developed," she reasonably asks, "except through exercise on materials that are challenging and substantial?"

She clinches her argument with a devastating anecdote about the reply some teachers give when a visitor laments that students don't know what the Reformation was or when the Civil War occurred: "But they know how to look them up."

Behind such a response lies not just a strange theory of education but a strange epistemology, indeed a strange worldview. Or perhaps I should not say "strange," since the word implies such views are unusual. Instead, let's say such views are weird — weird though all too usual.

The very best of the many good moments in Cheney's brief booklet is its title, which suggests that schooling has to do with something other than "developing the student's full potential," a thing educators who have to give speeches love to talk about. Now, I've got nothing against student potential, full or otherwise; and I wish to God schools would do a better job of developing it than they do. But my stomach turns every time I hear "full potential" mentioned. Never mind that the phrase is sheer cant, meaning nothing in practice. Never mind either



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that the shortness of human life, along with other aspects of the human condition that cabin, crib, and confine our potential, make it impossible that any human being, let alone a child or adolescent, will develop his or her "full potential." What is truly objectionable about this phrase is the premise which lies behind it, namely, that schooling exists purely and simply for the sake of the individual child.

One of the purposes of schooling, true enough, is the good of the individual student. But another purpose is the good of the community — the community conceived not narrowly, as to include only those living at the present hour, but broadly, to include generations that went before and others that will come after. We have obligations not just to the living but to the dead and the unborn as well.

Yet a third purpose of schooling is not only supra- individual but supra-communal. In a world short on the vocabulary of piety and long on the vocabulary of rights, it is difficult to make this point, but let me try. We have obligations, it seems to me, to subject matter. That is, certain high cultural values, once having come into the world through invention or discovery, have a right to remain and flourish in the world; they have a right to be maintained, cultivated, studied, cherished. The argument for teaching, e.g., Shakespeare, in the schools, is that we owe it to students, we owe it to society, and we owe it to the poetry itself. Not to teach it is to be unfair toward students and society, and to demonstrate a lack of piety toward one of the high values of our civilization.

Cheney does not go as far as I do in this regard; she does not elevate certain cultural values to a quasi-divine status. But she goes far enough; she calls for the revival of the study of history, literature, and foreign languages in our schools; for a revolution in textbook writing so that students will be able to get their hands on good literature and lively history; and for teachers who have a sound knowledge of their subject matter.

Cheney's essay is not intended to be especially subtle, profound, or innovative. Its great virtue is that it plainly speaks a few home truths: that there are certain things every halfway educated person ought to know; that by and large our high school graduates don't know them; and that much of the blame for this deplorable situation falls on our educational establishment.

Inspired by her simple candor, let me take a fling at saying something that is almost equally obvious but even more rarely said. One of the reasons education in America is so poor is that the people who run our school systems, the top administrators, are themselves not normally very well educated.

I do not mean to deny that these administrators are talented, well-intentioned, and hard-working; for they usually are. Nor do I mean that they are not smart and well-trained; for they usually are this, too. When I say they are not well educated, I mean they are not persons of broad, high, general culture. They often have doctorates in education. But an Ed.D. means only that a person is clever, determined, and diligent; it does not mean that he or she has a lively, perceptive, or well-furnished mind.

Look to the end, the old proverb says; the destination dictates the journey; if I don't know where I'm going, I'll have a difficult time figuring out how to get there. The people in charge of American schooling have no satisfactory vision of what their product should be like. As they set about their work, they have no ideal in mind of the educated person. And how should they? They are not trained to develop such an ideal. They are not paid to develop such an ideal. They are trained and paid to be managerial technicians. They are trained and paid, in other words, to carry about the logistics of the journey, not the destination.

Cheney closes her fine essay with a wisdom passage from Mark Twain. As these things go, it is not a bad passage. But Americans, I'm afraid, will never be properly educated until we disabuse ourselves of the notion that Mark Twain is a first-class writer. He is, next of course to Walt Whitman, who always occupies first place in this regard, our most overrated author.

Apart from this uncharacteristic lapse, *American Memory* is wonderfully salutary reading. It remains to be seen if the educational establishment is capable of profiting from it.

## OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

# THE MONSTER'S SPELL

### TELEVISION & THE ELECTORATE

"The negotiations are so secret," says the portly senator in Wagner's "Grin and Bear It" cartoon, "only the anchormen of the three networks know about them!" We smile, but we know it's not very funny. It is close to the truth. Anchormen *do* affect foreign policy. All too frequently we see them interviewing heads of state, trying, for the purpose of *making* news, to force them into choices and definitive statements which, if they were to make them, would certainly jeopardize whatever diplomatic maneuvers they might be undertaking. As Sharon Rockefeller, for a decade a member of the board of Public Broadcasting, said in a speech last spring, even Reagan and Gorbachev had to call for a "news blackout" in order to be able to conduct business during their summit meetings.

Historian Barbara Tuchman, who sees our civilization in probable decline, is bitter about it: "Today, television has become our monarch. It determines more and more our choice of candidates for office and the persons we elect." This is the result, she says, of our "visual — which is to say a non-thinking — culture" which has been inculcated by tele-



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vision: "a great boon to the ill and lonely, but the degree to which it has impaired the brain cells of the general population has not been measured" (*New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 20, 1987).

"Impaired the brain cells"? Strong words, but perhaps not too strong. Mrs. Rockefeller reminded her audience that television is turned on eight hours a day in the average American home. Surveys, she added, have made it clear that television rates higher than the family, organized religion, and the newspapers in having a direct effect on each of us.

Readers of this column know that the effect of television on our thinking and behavior has been a preoccupation of mine. One of the advantages of living a fairly long time — something I share with Barbara Tuchman — is that one can see the results of change. We who are older remember when it wasn't always this way, when — dare we insist? — things were better.

Another effect of television about which I have written is the way in which "a callous disregard for privacy is cheapening our common life," and creating real harm — "a wearing away of reticence, a coarsening of fiber, and a blunting of the sense of what is fit and what is not" (*The Catholic Bulletin*, September 30, 1982). The often striking intelligence of the audiences on the Donahue and Oprah Winfrey shows and the apparent earnestness of the hosts cannot conceal the fact that the line between private fact and public fact has been lost.

We have been a nation accustomed to violence — a nation of gunbearers, if not gunslingers — but surely the ingesting of hour after hour of violence, much of it gratuitous, is making us more violent and teaching our young the techniques of violence. Spokesmen for the industry deny this, but common sense tells us so. The British, although their surveys also do not show a correlation between violence on the screen and violence in real life, inspect American shows for gratuitous violence as a matter of course. (The BBC refused to show four recent episodes of "Miami Vice.") They are also cutting the number of American series shown in their prime time. The decision, reporters say, was influenced by the incident of the villager, who, dressed as Rambo, went on a shooting rampage and killed sixteen people in one small town. He had seen the film *First Blood* on television. (Eighty-one percent of American TV films contain violence, reports *Washington Post* London correspondent Karen deYoung, as compared to 46 percent of British films.)

Television personalities often deplore the situation but plead helplessness. NBC's Bill Plante, for instance, recently wrote an *apologia* for the reporters shouting questions at President Reagan at ceremonial events and "photo opportunities" — an uncivil practice for which they had been criticized. It was the only way they could get news, he said. But are the president's one-liners, obviously prepared in advance, really news? Or is there a kind of collusion here?

This past summer I was co-chairperson of a symposium on television and television writing. Although they had varied perceptions of the seriousness of it, all the speakers saw themselves as subject to the limits on creativity and selection of programming imposed
by the commercial interest of the industry, and the technological conditions of production allied to them. Douglas Kiker, NBC correspondent, saw a great shortage of television news-writers who could master simple, forceful, informative declarative sentences. "Television eats them up," she said. Corinne Jacker, an Emmy award-winning senior writer of several series described the chaotic conditions under which a writer works. The "senior" writer doesn't write, for example, but concocts the story line. Actors are employed for different days, even half-days, and have to be written in and out of the plot accordingly. Pat Collins, who has been a reporter and editor for all three networks, pleaded for the sponsorship of just one hour a week of creative programming.

When asked by the audience what could be done, all except Joe Raposo, composer and one of the creators of "Sesame Street," gave the standard answer: "Bring pressure to bear — write the sponsors, write your local station." Raposo pointed out that the decline since the days when corporations took pride in having their products associated with good programming (e.g., Kraft Theater) has been precipitate. Advertising agencies make the money decisions on the basis of the number of viewers and the number of thirty-second spots which can be scattered among the most popular shows. Raposo shares Barbara Tuchman's view that the choice of programs is ultimately being made by an audience already damaged in perception by television viewing. He predicted that we might be preparing an electorate incapable of handling democracy — an idea allied to Tuchman's statement: "I consider the main point of the Iran affair deeper than the issue of incompetence in government. It is the public's acceptance of the picture image without regard to the reality."

*"Those were the facts, reported objectively. We now return you to your own irrational prejudices."*



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Kay Ryan

## Caryatid

Caryatids look
slightly languid.
They have grace
under weight;
straight, but
not too straight,
an alignment lost
along with
Pericles' helmet.
We may attribute
some of it to
the garments —
thin shifts
quarried from
cliffs of the
purest marble
and inseparable
from the flesh.
In the sense
that a caryatid
is born, she is
born dressed
and refined, ready
for whatever might
descend. She is
not dependent
upon spine;
her ease runs
through the grain.
She is planned
miles away
at the quarry
for the load
she will carry.
It is never
that surprise
that sometimes
stiffens a woman
and hardens her eyes.

Joan Rohr Myers

## Towards Morning

Through a fog befitting Sherlock Holmes
seep clues to the strict
construction of oaks.

Mysterious lines on silver skin
they are signs
to something within us
like boned wings of great birds
that stiffen and stay
when loose things are gone.

In the downdrift of softness
a hard tension grows
delivering the Angelus
clear, through a night-long
blur of silence.

Leslie Jean Coulthard

## Growth

Slough off, slough off
the shackling skin,
the bitter garments
of despair:
your parents
and your siblings
slip, like undone
ecstasies that flare
and die upon
the silken air,
into the left-behind:
nowhere.
Move yourself on
and leave them there.

Nancy G. Westerfield

## Amortization

Taking your pocket calculator, consider
This death-making of the loan of self:
How it annualizes by constant check
At any bank of mirrors, where the pall
Of thinning hair, the wither of skin,
The end of all brilliancy of beginnings,
Counters your borrower's notion that what
You would pay so dearly upon, you would get
To keep. Long interest has eaten up
The principal; the lease you thought
To be written for seventy years, without notice
May be revoked at forty, thirty, or even closer
To issue; the terms are unknown. Amortization
That is papered in a foreign coin
At its own rate of exchange, is exacting
Its currency from tissue of body and brain,
While the essence you supposed was soul
Matures as only your sad gift for coming
To terms with the balance of loan.



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# THE RESEGREGATION OF AMERICA

## PROMISE & THE UNDERCLASS

JIM SLEEPER

For lots of compelling historical and ideological reasons, most of American society — our popular culture, formal government, electoral politics, and media — have never been very straightforward on the subject of social class. Our popular and official understanding has come down to something like this: there may be dramatic, even intolerable disparities of income and opportunity in America, but there is also a saving grace: the sheer dynamism and fluidity of our market economy, democratic policy, and open culture insure that no specific individual or group need be trapped at the bottom of the social scale. Low birth and bad luck are formidable obstacles, but less decisive in America than anywhere else. Any family may go "from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves" in three or four generations as fortunes are won, lost, and won again. Individual capacity and our protean economy reinforce each other, creating a kind of permanent revolution; each generation of Americans, from the lowliest immigrants to scions of great wealth, must be sent out onto its playing fields and trained for its rigors. No matter which players win or lose, society as a whole reaps the rewards of their strivings.

But again, the permanent revolution has had a permanent exception — blacks, who were written as such right into the Constitution by its framers. It isn't surprising that the Communists of the 1930s and forties, anxious to discredit this American fantasy of a society without permanent classes and eager to sow a different sort of revolution whose goal was classlessness itself, championed (and, to their credit, practiced) racial integration. For the Communists, of course, weaving the black thread right into the center of the social fabric was really a way to unravel the fabric itself, exposing its contradictions and lies: this society was not, and under capitalism could not be, a fount of endless opportunity; it had to marginalize some portion of its population, black or otherwise; it had to violate its own stated creed. With blacks visible and insistent, Americans wouldn't be able to delude themselves about that any longer.

Liberals welcomed the challenge, confident that the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth could offer opportunity to all. All that was needed was some collective action to lift the bottom of the social scale in order to facilitate the old game of opportunity on terms more open and fair than before. Indeed, the New-Deal, wartime, and Cold-War economies outflanked the radical left for more than forty years.

But a catch in the liberal dispensation has caught up with it: the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth has become an increasingly interdependent part of a larger capitalist world economy that has no stake in America's resolution of its own, comparatively minor inequities. If the Communists earlier failed to win Americans to their vision of inevitable confrontation and complete social reconstruction, liberals seem now to

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have failed in their promise of energetic accommodation and adjustment based on an ever-expanding, ever more balanced economy. Expanding the economy might still be; balanced and controlled by Americans it is not; and unskilled, low-skilled, and blue-collar workers, along with unemployed people, categories including most blacks, are the losers.

For them, the default of the liberal promise is all the more embittering for the fanfare with which that promise was affirmed by the War on Poverty and the Great Society of the 1960s. At the 1963 March on Washington, Martin Luther King characterized constitutional guarantees of liberty and the pursuit of happiness as a kind of "promissory note" which blacks had finally come to cash. "We refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt," he added, putting liberals on the line. Twenty-five years later, in the very term "underclass," the old left's divisive notion of social class seems to have reasserted itself in American life with a kind of spectral vengeance, haunting white liberal and black integrationist affirmations of the equal opportunity myth.

As usual, though, the economy itself and its changing class structures escape serious scrutiny in the public debate. Traditional liberals cling to the faith that the economy can be variably taxed, regulated, and subsidized in order to forestall destitution in some quarters and buy social peace in others. In so doing, they hand easy targets to conservatives like George Gilder, Charles Murray, and Lawrence Meade, who also refuse to challenge the nature of the economy; instead, as liberal tinkering fails, these conservatives charge liberals with coddling the poor into chronic dependency and distorting capitalism through irresponsible impositions which also undermine the culture of individual merit and initiative. In other words, unemployment and its ravages are the liberals' fault, not the economy's.

Stung, some liberals have edged toward the right, blaming the left and even the underclass itself for the intractable new poverty. Implicitly, at least — and, I would suggest, irresponsibly — they acquiesce in the conservative drive for a restoration of the classical liberal (i.e., nineteenth-century) opportunity society so well established in American myth,with emphasis (perhaps also worthy of the nineteenth century) on the social rehabilitation of those who, despite liberals' best efforts to expand opportunity, have declined to suit up and come out on the field. In this view, advanced, for example, by Nicholas Lemann in a two-part *Atlantic* article, "The Origins of the Underclass," new programs ought to push and pull minority ghetto dwellers out of their debilitating isolation from the rest of society in order to socialize them to work and responsibility. The rest of society's stake in creating and maintaining ghettos is scarcely mentioned, let alone examined.

Some neoliberals do candidly acknowledge that changing structures of opportunity throughout the society are perverting middle- and upper-class cultures as well as the culture of the underclass. Many of the more fortunate among us also weasel out of the risks and rigors of the opportunity game in favor of elaborate protections that only harden class lines and deepen ghetto isolation, even amid progress against overt racial discrimination. But, for the most part, these considerations are muted; the question of class rears its head only in preoccupation with the "underclass," which threatens the corporate capitalist consensus. No wonder King's faith in racial integration has been rejected bitterly by so many of his black legatees. No wonder a minor branch of neoconservative scholarship has dedicated itself, not to examining the new economic underpinnings of class division, but to demonstrating that King was really a tool of Communist advisors intent upon sowing such division.

This inconclusive and largely disingenuous debate has only deepened the disaffection of thoughtful blacks like Harold Cruse, Professor Emeritus of History and Afro-American Studies at the University of Michigan and author of *Plural but Equal* (William Morrow, $22.95, 420 pp.). If white America will do almost anything but acknowledge its class divisions, why should blacks allow white liberals and the left to keep using them as stalking horses for compromised and/or hopeless agendas? Aren't both liberal pieties about racial integration and leftist dreams of progressive, interracial coalition ultimately dead ends? And, for that reason, isn't liberal and left solicitude toward blacks just another dimension of racism itself?

Despairing of conservative market solutions, liberal integrationist reforms, and leftist coalitions for social reconstruction, Cruse believes that only a deeper, more self-directed black marginality holds any hope of black dignity and power, such as it may be in an intractably divided, inhospitable society. And make no mistake: his is an intelligent man's despair. As anyone will know who has watched Louis Farrakhan's rallies and the effective demagoguery of the black attorneys for the victims of New York's awful Howard Beach assaults, Cruse speaks for a growing if not yet large number of bitterly alienated middle-class blacks. They have benefited from whatever economic and social integration liberalism in its heyday was able to provide, only to find it empty of genuine social promise. Even in "succeeding," they feel isolated, unfulfilled, and so are withdrawing into a cold, internal, often largely unspoken separatism.

Liberals who take Cruse seriously enough to be frightened by what he and other disaffected, well-educated blacks are saying may find themselves driven into the arms of William Julius Wilson. I hope so. Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* (University of Chicago, $19.95, 295 pp.) is the best effort yet to sort out the confused debate about race and class in our postwar political economy. It is a flawed book, tediously academic in style, unlikely to capture the imaginations of those enthralled by Gilder's luminous metaphors or Meade's pieties about the social obligations of the poor. But it is an invaluable midcourse correction to liberalism's wobbly march through the swamps of race and class since the waning of the early civil rights movement. And it is at the same time a potent reproof both to conservatives who would leave corporate capitalism unchallenged and to blacks who indulge separatist



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fantasies of autonomy and/or flamboyant assertions of black power and black rights.

What does Wilson, a social democrat and professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, say to liberals? That neither the early civil rights movement's emphasis on individual liberties nor the later, often contradictory effort to tease "group rights" out of the Constitution is adequate to address the problems of the truly disadvantaged or confront the economy's class divisions. He reminds us how radically liberals have zigzagged across the constitutional battleground in their pursuit of justice: government, under the liberal aegis, went from insuring "that people were not formally categorized on the basis of race" to insuring that they *were* — whether or not they wanted to be or even, in some cases, needed to be. This liberal shift from equality of individual opportunity, which emphasizes a color-blind respect for a person's merits and rights beneath the skin, to equality of condition, which submerges those considerations in a color-*based* respect for the putative "rights" of whole racial or ethnic groups historically victimized by society, was a fateful, typically American dodging of the more fundamental issue of social class, which transcends both individuals and racial groupings.

Liberals' habitual confusion of historic discrimination with current discrimination prevents them from seeing the contradictions between these two very different emphases, Wilson claims. To their credit, liberals have done much, often heroically, to reduce current racial discrimination, only to discover that — as Lyndon Johnson emphasized in a famous speech at Howard University — the cumulative disadvantages bequeathed to blacks by historical discrimination have kept many of them from making the most of a more open society where individual rights are protected. Liberals' consequent emphasis on "equal opportunity for historically victimized groups through a system of collective racial and ethnic entitlements" is a legitimate, if perhaps temporary, expedient in the struggle to overcome the effects of past discrimination on the basis of race.

Where liberals go wrong, according to Wilson, is in their failure to recognize that the rather crude expedient of lumping different individuals together on the basis of skin color cannot, in fact, be "temporary" in a corporate capitalist economy, with its inevitable class divisions and its marginalizing of a growing stratum of working poor and structurally unemployed people. Yet the longer the emphasis on race-based group entitlements persists, the more it actually undermines political and economic support for the truly disadvantaged. Blacks who, thanks to these very expedients, are no longer disadvantaged continue to qualify for preferments on the basis of skin color alone, while whites, who constitute two-thirds of the poor, and who are joining the ranks of the working poor as steel and auto workers are laid off, do *not* qualify, even though they *are* truly disadvantaged. The result is that the costs of even means-tested programs that *aren't* based on race, like AFDC or Medicaid, are blamed on blacks by hard-pressed,


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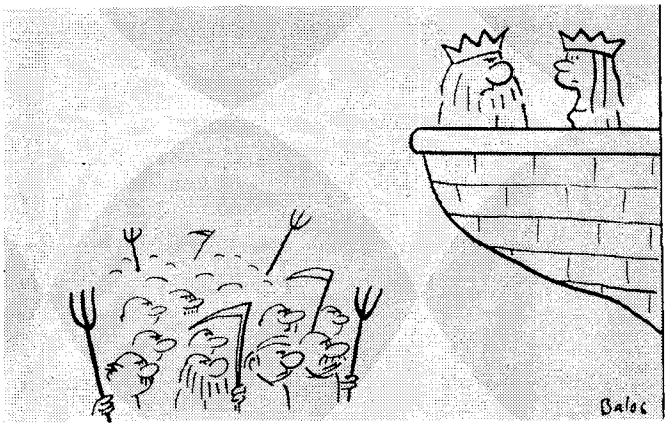

*"I got them all jobs, and now they want* salaries!"

moderate-income white taxpayers, who foot the bills but don't qualify for the services.

The only solution Wilson can find is a two-fold social democratic agenda whose prongs are political and economic. Politically, programs that are means-tested or targeted on the basis of race must be superseded by universal, Social Security-like programs, such as guaranteed minimum incomes and child-support allowances given to all citizens, regardless of class or race. Economically, there must be a democratic socialist reconstruction that guarantees full employment. Without social programs to which all citizens can relate personally and positively, and without burgeoninig entry-level job opportunities, there will be neither political support nor the economic wherewithal to dissolve the underclass.

Where the political support for such dramatic changes will come from in a society whose people are already factionalized and clinging to their meager prerogatives within the system as it is, Wilson does not say. He leaves it to other students of society, like Robert Reich in his *Tales of the New America* (Times Books, 1987), to explore just how Americans might be persuaded to exchange outmoded, shortsighted mythologies of individual success for more compelling visions of cooperation and solidarity. But Wilson insists, rightly, I think, that unless liberals can somehow transcend themselves to embrace his solutions, they cannot hope to help the underclass or reduce the cynicism, fear, and selfishness spreading among the other classes.

Wilson's analysis rests on an important distinction which he feels liberals and conservatives alike have failed to grasp. The pathologies of an overwhelmingly minority underclass are real, all right, just as conservatives have been saying. The left-liberal attempt to pretend otherwise in the drive for race-based entitlements during the 1970s only made those conditions worse by refusing to address them. But that does *not* mean that cultural reconditioning or behavior modification holds any promise for the underclass. There is an important difference of analysis here. The conservative and neoliberal view of the *"culture of poverty"* holds that underclass pathology has taken on a life of its own, and has become impervious to economic incentives. Wilson argues that the pathology, while deep and powerful, is ultimately *situational* — a product of the physical *isolation and concentration* of poor blacks in ghettos, which in turn reflects not so much of their own culture but the economy, politics, culture, and historic racial discrimination of the whole society — the fundamental American hypocrisy about class.

Americans *want* to reduce problems of class division and impoverishment to failures of individual initiative and of group subcultures; and the neoliberal and conservative preoccupation with rehabilitating the underclass reflects this hypocrisy as much as does the racist assumption of black inferiority. Special solicitude toward blacks is as damaging as racism itself, for it undermines political and cultural support for the universal social programs, like child support allowances and guaranteed minimum incomes, which, coupled with full employment, hold the only hope of ending black poverty and, indeed, poverty itself.

What is Wilson saying specifically to conservatives? In a sense, very little, because they are even less willing than liberals to contemplate his political and economic agenda. It is worth noting, though, that Richard Nixon and Daniel Patrick Moynihan tried to pass a guaranteed minimum income program, only to be beaten back (in part) by liberals enthralled by the language of group entitlements based on race. But the latter were not the traditional New Deal liberals, nor were Nixon and Moynihan true conservatives; perhaps the sharpening of ideological divisions in subsequent debate has clarified some issues in ways that might actually lead to more intelligent consensus. Since the corporate capitalist center of gravity will remain unmoved, however, Wilson's grounds for optimism are weak. Only if Robert Reich's new legends of social cooperation take root as the economy and society evolve will there be much hope for Wilson's agenda.

Finally, what is Wilson saying to black separatists and nationalists? He is saying that, however tempting the frustration of his own social democratic agenda may make black nationalism seem, black nationalism's political and economic programs hold even less promise. Harold Cruse argues — compellingly, on the basis of the historical record he cites — that the drive toward racial integration and assimilation represents a wrong turn taken by black leaders after the post-Reconstruction South quashed not only integration, but also the truly "separate but equal" vision which Cruse champions, in contrast to Kenneth Clark and other supporters of the *Brown* decision mandating school integration. Truly equal and separate black schools would have done more for black professionals and black pride than integration has done, Cruse argues, the more so because the society has amply demonstrated its determination and its ability to resegregate itself even in the wake of *Brown* and all that flowed from it.

Wilson does not directly address this argument, because he holds that current conditions make it moot, in two senses. Such



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black separateness as we have is so intolerably disadvantaged that nothing constructive can come of it; and, for those blacks who have succeeded at least modestly, the absorptive powers of an increasingly interdependent society are irresistible, even if skewed and enormously frustrating.

I doubt that Wilson would oppose a deepening of black cultural awareness and pride, or even the informal but potent political and economic solidarity so effectively practiced by inner-city white ethnics in the past and some of the newer minority immigrant groups today. But political and economic initiatives undertaken along publicly and explicitly black lines will only undermine public support for both the existing, legitimate race-targeted programs and, more importantly, for the fundamental political and economic restructuring which alone can conquer poverty. In America today, Wilson insists, the suffering of the disadvantaged of all races — and indeed, especially of disadvantaged blacks — can be addressed only through what he calls the "hidden agenda" incorporated into universal social programs and full employment.

I think he is right, and — given liberal hypocrisy about full employment, conservative intransigence about economic planning, and growing black alienation from white America — he is courageous.

## STAGE

# PHILADELPHIA ON PITCH

## OLIVER SACKS'S 'HAT'

The 1987 American Music Theater Festival, which ran in Philadelphia from September 12 to October 11, presented its most ambitious season to date. In six new productions, it demonstrated the multiplicity behind the label *music theater* and, by importing works from England and Zaire, it redefined the *American* of its title. The offerings have not all been rewarding, but the festival itself remains as provocative as it is eclectic.

The hot ticket this year was the first professional production of Harry Partch's 1959 extravaganza, *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*. As in past festivals — the reconstructed *Strike Up the Band* in 1984, Duke Ellington's *Queenie Pie* in 1986 — it was an attempt to resurrect a bit of the American musical past and, judging by the reception on the night I was there, it was an exciting event for much of the audience. My response was restrained. The marvelous instruments that Partch invented to accommodate his musical theory — his forty-three note octave — are a joy to hear and to see, but I found them most fascinating in the post-production demonstration presided over by Danlee Mitchell, Partch's disciple and heir.

As I understand it, Partch conceived *Revelation* as a grand spectacle with his music at its heart, the chanting and singing voices of the performers joining the instruments to provide the force that would carry the destructive passion of the piece. My experience of the music was compromised both by Partch's dramatic conception and by the way in which it was realized in this production. It is Partch's conceit that there is a workable equivalent between the bacchantes of Dionysius and rock-and-roll fans, and that a conjunction of the two will tell us something about ecstatic possession. For that reason, he divides his piece into contemporary sequences, in which the rock star (Dion) is welcomed to an ordinary American town, and scenes from *The Bacchae*, which stick fairly close to the Euripides original. A program note by Mitchell suggests that the piece is mainly concerned with the "undisciplined sensuality" of "mediocre societies," but Euripides, who understood that obsession comes in a great many shapes, was as concerned with Pentheus's rigidity as with Agave's intoxication. Perhaps because the Partch vision is simplistic, he fails in his contemporary Pentheus, for Sonny's accepting Dion's jacket is neither clear nor clearly motivated, as Pentheus's going into drag is, and Sonny's destruction at the hands of the groupies is incomprehensible except as a balancing artifice.

These weaknesses in the script were heightened by a production in which the clutter of the playing area seemed untidy rather than demonic. Rock possession was conveyed much more convincingly (if comically) in *Bye Bye Birdie* back in 1960, not so coincidentally the year in which *Revelation* was first performed at the University of Illinois. When Partch's teen-aged idolaters ran off in this production and came back as bacchantes in Grecian *schmotkas*, they writhed conventionally, conveying neither sexuality nor ecstasy. There was the incidental fun of the gymnasts, the baton twirler, the jugglers, the marching band; but the potential of both Partch's instruments and the Euripides original was never achieved in *Revelation*.

More rewarding, if less ambitious, was *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, a one-act opera based on a case study by Oliver Sacks, the neurologist with a gift for titles. Christopher Rawlence's libretto sticks very close to the Sacks essay, taking both incidents and — particularly in the spoken sections — words from the source. The opera is simply a series of diagnostic examinations in which The Examiner discovers that Dr. P, a musician and teacher, suffers from both external and internal agnosia; although he can still perceive structure, he cannot register what he sees on the left side and he no longer has the visual memory to recognize simple objects. He can describe a rose or a glove in terms of its components, its dimensions, its shapes, but he does not know what it is. Still, he continues to function in society, using his ears as his eyes, and with his wife he has devised a musical code to help him — a dressing song, bathing song, an eating song. The composer, Michael Nyman, following Sacks, uses a Schumann lied to indicate the kind of coherence now missing from Dr. P's life; for the rest, Nyman provides a constant underlay, an evocation of the musical structure on which Dr. P depends on his chaotic visual world. By the time the piece reaches the climactic tea party, in which, as the Sacks original says, "Hungrily, hummingly, Dr. P starts on the cakes," the wordless song has



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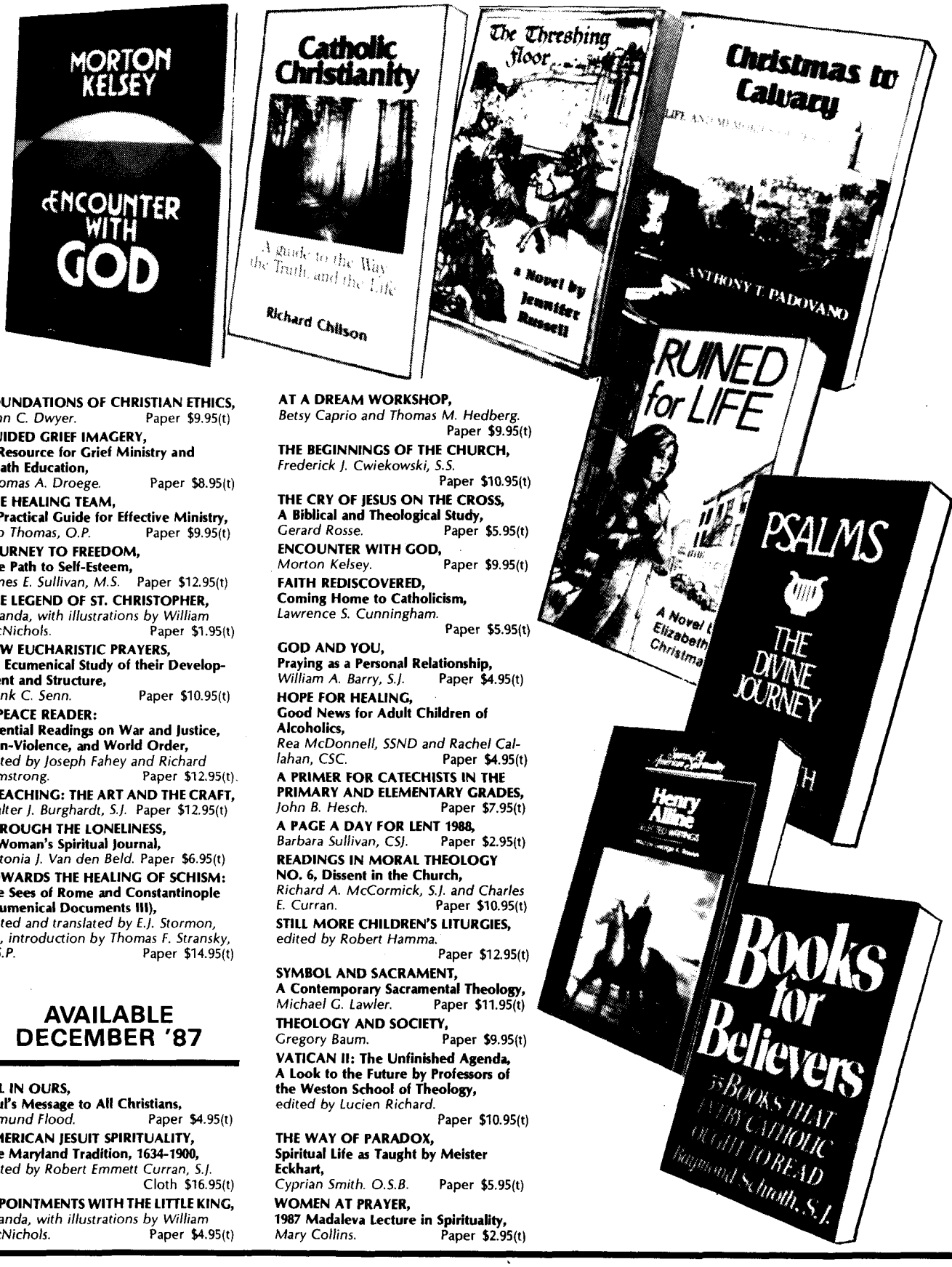


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become more intense, somehow terrifying, even though the opera, like Sacks's study, celebrates Dr. P's strategy for circumventing his disability. The opera was played on a set that was almost like a picture frame surrounding the small orchestra, so that music would be at the center of the piece visually as well as aurally. There were many nice small things in the production — the simple gesture in which Dr. P reaches for his wife's head instead of his hat — but one of the cleverest inventions was the use of an old Hollywood film. In the case study, Sacks explains that Dr. P, watching a Bette Davis movie on television with the sound turned off, not only failed to recognize the actress but had no sense that an intense love scene was going on. The opera substitutes *Dark Victory* for Sacks's unnamed movie and uses the diagnostic scene in which Davis learns that she is suffering from an irreversible condition. Dr. P's disorientation is dramatized and at the same time, for those of us who know the movie, there is a double perception that reminds us that the allusion hangs on our own visual memory being intact. *Hat,* which came to Philadelphia from the London Institute of Contemporary Art and went on to play two performances at the Guggenheim in New York, was — for me, at least — the high point of the festival, even though it had to struggle against the bad acoustics in the hall in which it was presented.

Of the other four productions, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* was the one with Broadway longings. Based on Mordecai Richler's novel, with a book by Richler and director Austin Pendleton, it failed to catch the feel of Montreal, the swirl of motivations driving Duddy, or the outrageous funniness of the original; the music by Alan Menken, whose *Little Shop of Horrors* has been playing for years, was vigorous in a generic way — no recognizable *Duddy* label. *Let Freedom Sing!,* a largely satirical look at our constitutional rights in this bicentennial year, had a few funny sketches, of which the best was a parody of Miss America in which the contestants were presidential candidates; for the most part, however, the show was simply right-thinking, liberal mode, and a little bland. *Stauf,* by Michael Sahl and Eric Salzman, the festival's artistic director, drowned some fine voices in a confused reworking of the Faust legend to a score so eclectic that it sounded like a demonstration of American styles from the operatic to country music. The dance opera from Zaire, *Nodiho (The Blood Pact),* tells a tale of forest demons, magical rescue, and societal reconciliations. The story was told not in dance but through broad gestures which suggested the vocabulary of silent movies; dance was used as an expression of group response, primarily joyful.

As this hurried account makes clear, a number of the works fell short of their best intentions, but failure in the American Music Theater Festival is not the same as failure in the commercial theater. The festival is a process, and a successful one, in which some works can stumble without tripping up the continuing creative impulse of the endeavor as a whole.

GERALD WEALES

## SCREEN

# VEINS THAT RUN DEEP

## SAYLES'S 'MATEWAN'

*Matewan* is close to being a great film. The word should be (and has been, in this column) used rarely; but in style and content this work comes close. Its writer and director, independent filmmaker John Sayles, doesn't follow trends, but sets or deflects them. His first film, *The Return of the Secaucus Seven*, a study of a reunion of sixties radicals in the Age of Reagan, preceded *The Big Chill* and beat it in depth as well. His second, *Lianna*, dealt with a woman caught between leaving her husband and experimenting with lesbian love on a richer, less lurid level than later movies like *Desert Hearts*. In *Brother from Another Planet,* Sayles even managed to add a twist to clichéd sci-fi with original, gentle, mock heroic.

All of these films have been produced outside of the Hollywood studio system; even with defects, all are memorable films. Sayles consistently gets high results from low budgets. His screenplays also continually tackle innocence— enjoyed, lost, regained—as if their stories simply mirrored his roots in the civil rights and antiwar movements and his struggle to maintain quality in cinema today. Both in the understated style and thoughtful content of his films, Sayles has always been trying to keep the best of the 1960s alive.

In *Matewan*, a real-life story of coal miners making brave attempts to form a union in the "red scare" days after World War One, Sayles has finally put everything together: story, acting, costume, sets, and his fine writing. The film's only defect is pace, which feels a tad slow at times; Sayles compensates with some thrilling suspense as the miners try to resist the brutal power of company thugs attempting to break their strike. The tension building up to shoot-outs in *Matewan* at times nears that in *High Noon*.

Sayles's suspense thrives, mainly because of the film's evocation of place, a small town in the back hollows of West Virginia. Sayles set his cameras just down river from the Hatfields and McCoys (indeed, one Sid Hatfield turns up here, mighty quick on the draw), where the Blue Mountain Coal Company owns everything around, not excluding a few souls. "H'it were 1920," the film's narrator, a young mountain boy, tells us in his authentic sounding first line. Everything thereafter is authentic as well. For this, Sayles may thank his production crew (mostly female, especially the production designer, Nora Chavooshian), cinematographer (Haskell Wexler), and mostly no-name cast who have worked hard and successfully to reclaim the sufferings of backwoods folk from film and country music cliché.



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These same mountains once provided one of the best openings of any American movie: the initial twenty minutes of *Coal Miner's Daughter*, where camera, Sissy Spacek, and her father (Levon Helm) magically spun film into myth. But that film slid downhill, so to speak, once it settled into a "star" biography (of Loretta Lynn); it also fit well into the "down-home" nostalgic superficiality of the late Carter/early Reagan years.

Sayles is after bigger game; his target is that ideology itself. By identifying the original historical value of unions in protecting the worker, *Matewan* marks the Year of the Lame Duck. "If you ain't with the company, there ain't no work," a hardbitten mountain woman tells a suspicious-looking newcomer in town, Joe Kenehan. Through her, Sayles addresses the forgetful contemporary audience, many of them tempted by conservative propaganda to reduce unionism to scandal. *Matewan* is a historical film only in Santayana's sense: those who forget the past are bound to repeat it.

Indeed, Sayles makes Kenehan, a union organizer, his hero. Kenehan (well played by the relatively unknown Chris Cooper) is unembarrassed in calling himself a "red" or reciting tales of the Wobblies. But Kenehan is an innocent committed to nonviolence; he labors to prevent the shoot-outs that loom between miners and company killers, especially the slick, sadistic Mr. Hickey (Kevin Tighe) and the sick, sadistic Griggs (Gordon Clapp)—two vivid monsters who come less by way of *High Noon* than *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*. Much of Kenehan's work involves either turning the other cheek to their provocations, or persuading the local Scotch-Presbyterian miners to unite with black and Italian "scabs" who have also sickened of Blue Mountain Coal. "Few Clothes" Johnson (James Earl Jones) leads the blacks into Kenehan's union, which becomes Sayles's image of interracial harmony and equality. Jones's mostly quiet, wonderful work here recalls both Paul Robeson's in *How Green Was My Valley* and the real-life "red" idealism that got Robeson into such trouble.

Sayles also uses Jones in one tense scene in the middle of the film, when the miners have been duped into thinking Kenehan is a spy; Jones dissolves the tension with one grand bit of comic relief. Indeed, Sayles is unafraid of comedy spoiling the somberness of the story, and uses it to enrich our sense of the full, unwooden reality of the characters. Drawling hillbillies, diverted when hunting, lackadaisically save the miners from a company attack. A wife of an Italian miner, so horrified when her husband joins the "syndicato" that she prays desperately before icons of Mary, falls into constant serio-comic squabbles with a severe Protestant miner's mom.

Music (with blacks on harmonicas, Italians on mandolins, natives on fiddles) is nicely used to literalize the eventual harmony among the victims. Sayles used country gospel singer Hazel Dickens and blues harmonica master John Hammond to provide one of the most dramatically integrated soundtracks in a nonmusical film in some time. The taste involved here is superb.

But the richness of this film is most evident in Sayles's treatment of love and religion. Kenehan boards at first in the

rooming house owned by the company (of course) but run by Elma Radnor (Mary MacDonell), who had lost her husband in a mining fire. Admiration and affection grow between the two; but perhaps the clearest index of Sayles's refusal to surrender to even a trace of shlock is his avoidance of romance between them. He only allows Radnor one grand, keening cry at the close.

Radnor's son, Danny (Will Oldham), is the film's narrator, a fifteen-year-old blond-haired kid, even more of an innocent than Kenehan. He is forced to work in the mines but gifted with the power of eloquent preaching. Through him, Sayles treats religion respectfully but not reverently. "You have two choices in this town," Danny explains to Kenehan, "hard-shell Baptist or soft-shell Baptist," and at the "hard-shell" Sayles himself plays a comically absurd fire-and-brimstone preacher. But he also respects belief (a rarity among filmmakers), and constantly switches from union to church meetings without (à la Marx) treating the latter as opiate. The film's most thrilling moments occur when Danny, allowed to preach but forbidden political references, uses the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife to save his "Joseph," Joe Kenehan.

In all aspects of *Matewan*, Sayles has found a story in real life that rings true with religious and moral significance. All films involving violence these days move toward an "apocalypse," a grand climactic moment when the microcosmic world in the film seems close to bursting. By carefully evoking the religious atmosphere in the West Virginia hills, Sayles manages to renew the convention: the battle between good and evil that he presents feels much less like cinema's generic "apocalypse" than the real thing, with its genuine stakes. The best of art can only see through a glass darkly; at least *Matewan* uses a clear, clean lens.

TOM O'BRIEN



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# The mad monarchs of management

**MANUFACTURING MATTERS**
THE MYTH OF THE
POST-INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

**Stephen S. Cohen and John Zysman**
**Basic Books, $19.95, 297 pp.**

**RUSTED DREAMS**
HARD TIMES
IN A STEEL COMMUNITY

**David Bensman and Roberta Lynch**
**McGraw Hill, $17.95, 249 pp.**

**Eliot Janeway**

Professors of economics have come a long way since 1936, when Keynes directed his inimitable satire to the invisible influence that "defunct academic scribblers" exert over "madmen in authority." Today, their fraternal assertiveness by rote has elevated them to the status of the madmen in authority, all the nuttier because contemptuous of the real world in which markets are people and politics institutionalize popular habits, if not necessarily needs. Politicians have learned to campaign by putting their economists in favor on display, as the mad monarchs of yore once did their jesters and magicians.

In America's industrial-financial-educational complex today, no "think tank" power center exercises more magnetic power than the BRIE, the University of California Roundtable on International Economy at Berkeley. Under the direction of Professors Stephen S. Cohen and John Zysman, Berkeley is still the war-torn campus it was twenty years ago with rebellious campus youths. But today it is dedicated to on-the-job retraining for the endangered species occupying mega-corporate executive suites and searching for ultimate weapons to sport in international market combat. The cram course Professors Cohen and Zysman offer for casualties of international competition has established them as hot properties in the intense inter-campus competition for corporate favor.

In *Manufacturing Matters,* Cohen and Zysman have indeed made a provocative polemical case which no serious student of the economic realities behind statistical appearances and media ballyhoo can afford to ignore. Their title, however, is misleading. It describes a bare 25 percent of their ambitious text. In its introductory portion, described by its title, they set up a popular strawman ("the economy of services" in our "informational society"), which their expert exercise in overkill demolishes. Cohen and Zysman demonstrate that manufacturing matters decisively for any and every national economy, and no other form of economic activity can substitute.

This portion of the book renders a serious definitional service, long overdue (if overdone by the authors' analytical virtuosity), in debunking media hype celebrating growth in service employment at the expense of shrinkage in direct manufacturing employment. Cohen and Zysman show that high rates of employment, classified in a vacuum as "services," "depend directly on manufacturing." They go further, explaining that manufacturing is the main source of skilled, well-paying service jobs; and, that the decline in manufacturing employment has downgraded the quality of much service employment to unskilled, low-paying temps, enjoying no fringe benefits, yet smuggled into the employment statistics as bona fide full-time workers.

Academic tunnel-vision inhibits Cohen and Zysman, however, from going further to equate this latter phenomenon with the stubborn failure of consumer spending to confirm the employment dynamism claimed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Nor do they contrast the fate reserved for our older, higher-paid victims of manufacturing unemployment with the "opportunities" opening to our younger, lower-paid beneficiaries of service employment. Layoffs nowadays do not translate into new hirings. On the contrary, our disemployed are flung onto the human scrapheap of industrial America, left to wither away, as Lenin once promised the Soviet state would, without dignity or even subsistence — America's statistical equivalent of Russia's damned "non-persons." Those no longer looking for work number 6 million. Add that to the 6 percent officially admitted to be unemployed, and America's economy is seen to be losing full human participation at the same admitted 11-12 percent rate as Europe's, still also pictured in the media as enjoying a "slower rate of growth." More sloganizing covering up shrinkage.

So much for the timely and definitive contribution the book makes to sanity. The trouble starts after Cohen and Zysman prove that manufacturing matters, when they unveil their model of how it will continue to. Their vision of America's industrial future is an exercise in national policy insanity.

Lunacy, as Rousseau said of romance, has a logic of its own, which it pursues with zeal and consistency. Once its premises are accepted, its conclusion looms as irrefutable. Cohen and Zysman are hardly eccentrics or even doctrinaires. On the contrary, the insanity they advocate is based on a premise already adopted as the consensus slogan of establishment American economic thought: America's need to recapture her lost export competitiveness in world markets.



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Its muscular, axiomatic ring sounds a bipartisan chorus, echoed by the elders of the liberal left and the persuasive Secretary Baker holding forth on the responsible right. Historically, the non-political technocratic center commands a vantage point in American debate. Cohen and Zysman speak with the authority derived from their ownership of this invaluable franchise.

Like so many calls to recapture lost glory, this latest American outbreak of rational insanity reveals only one flaw: its disoriented governing premise. World trade competition is a mirage. The countries which do best at exporting goods are the countries which do most in exporting capital; that is, buying their exports by financing their customers. That's how Japan and Germany are doing it today; and that's how America did it before she gave away her lead role and became a debtor nation. Massive capital imports will not support export competitiveness.

In the wake of the subsidized import flood that has devastated industrial America, talk about regaining export competitiveness is a snare and a delusion — not least because all potential American export markets, beginning with Japan, can be seen shrinking and freezing into protectionism and barter in lockstep with U.S. domestic difficulties. (Difficulties which are currently shocking the stock market out of its euphoria.) Industrial America's overriding need is to regain competitiveness *inside* America's domestic markets, incomparably larger and more lucrative for American industry to tap than the world's various economic mega-ghettos.

Now comes more insanity, based deceptively upon flawless professional observation. The authors' description of "the American system" is definitive: "volume production of standard products sold to a mass market on the basis of price." So is their identification of its prototype: "Ford's Model T, in which a single company produced a single product in a single color." But they ignore the unique built-in, low-cost advantages that America's own limitless free market offers, as well as the unique ability of "the American system" to take advantage of these low costs. Instead, they complain that "the label of 'Fordist' production has been hung on the whole system."

This rational insanity drives them to advocate America's surrender of the decisive advantage of the economies of scale, which is the envy of the world, for no trade-off. Instead, they call for the retooling of American industry to exploit "the economies of scope." Their definition of scope — "economies gained in the volume production of a set of goods" — is too clear for comfort, and too logical as well. They envision the restructuring of American industry to fit its products into all the smaller, more or less open, more or less liquid markets around the world. A case of the tiger squeezing into traps too small to bait mice! Never mind the high cost of capital intensivity recommended, at present and prospective interest rates, presumably supported by present and prospective operating profit margins. Or how politicians, serving at the pleasure of the voters, "must" subordinate realities to blueprints to launch this high-cost, zero-return technocratic wild-goose chase. Or the cost to people trapped where their mortgages are, fearing the worst.

Economists bear a cruel responsibility, not merely for the fortunes of the governments whose policies they engineer, but for the plight of the people left in the lurch when those policies boomerang. *Rusted Dreams,* by David Bensman and Roberta Lynch, is an unpretentious, blood-chilling, down- to-curbstone account of communities blighted, lives wrecked, and trust betrayed by impractical policies and incompetent managements retreating from insecurity into outright trickery. Bensman is the Director of the Graduate Program in Labor Studies at Rutgers. Lynch is a community worker with a labor background in Chicago. Neither voices the pretentiousness of the economic establishment. *Rusted Dreams* is a bitter, poignant post- mortem on the fate of "the City of the Big Shoulder" Carl Sandburg saw dominated by the steel mill smokestacks of South Chicago. They have done their homework. Their case histories are Dickensian enough to remind Ronald Reagan that he once betrayed a labor union he headed.


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he once betrayed a labor union he headed.

At the turn of the century, at the University of Chicago, Thorstein Veblen developed his thesis that the "trained ignorance" of America's "captains of industry" is responsible for their wrong turns and recurrent crises. Never more so than in our enlightened era of professional management, deeper in MBAs than in thought. Where Cohen and Zysman bet their blueprints on hair-brained imperatives they decree to politicians, Bensman and Lynch base their tragic, gripping tale on commonsensical subsidies that politicians, impressed by people power, delivered at their own risk to major corporations for promised tradeoffs. But ignorant and hypocritical managements practiced sordid political treachery by grabbing the welfare benefits and damning the welfare clients to living deaths. *Rusted Dreams* will be more helpful than financial punditry to readers wondering whether October's Black Monday in the stock market was a reversal or just a correction inviting investors to reaffirm their faith in management.

## OLD-FASHIONED WAYS OF KNOWING

**CROSSING TO SAFETY**

**Wallace Stegner**

**Random House, $18.95, 277 pp.**

**Barbara A. Bannon**

This is Wallace Stegner's first novel since *Recapitulation* in 1979 and it is one of his finest and most moving. What Stegner has dared to do is show us over the years how love grows and deepens between two husbands and wives from the Depression years of the 1930s to the early 1970s and how love grows and deepens, too, among the four of them as friends, with never a hint of either man lusting after the other's wife.

It is such an old-fashioned way of looking at things as to be downright iconoclastic. And it is going to find an awful lot of readers out there who will recognize joyously that there are other people besides themselves who value true friendship this deeply. Stegner dedicates the novel to his wife, editor Mary Page Stegner, "for more than a half century of love and friendship, and to the friends we were both blessed by."

Stegner's first novel, *Remembered Laughter,* was published in 1937. His *Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1943) was a stunner. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for *Angle of Repose* and the National Book Award in 1977 for *The Spectator Bird*. Three of his short stories have won O. Henry prizes. Among his nonfiction has been *The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Bernard De Voto*. The *Los Angeles Times* gave him the Robert Kiroch Award in 1980 for his lifetime literary achievements. Part of those literary achievements has been his career as a teacher of writing, during which he has helped countless young writers find their own talents.

Stegner began his own teaching career at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and that is where he introduces us to the young Sally and Larry, Charity and Sid. But before this we have had one brief introductory 1970s chapter that lets us know what life holds in store for them is not always what they had hoped for.

Stegner writes of starry-eyed and pretty desperate young academics in the 1930s as if he had been one of them, and undoubtedly he was. Not the least of this novel's interest is not only the fictional story it has to tell us, but what it tells us about Stegner himself. No one could write a novel like this without drawing on deep personal experience.

Yet it would be a mistake to try to personalize *Crossing to Safety* too much. When Stegner, who was born in Lake Mills, Iowa in 1909, writes about earnest, anxious, desperately caring, very young academics in the Depression years of the 1930s, he is obviously writing about something he experienced himself. All those pot luck suppers, the rallying around each other in childbirth, the growing fear as the time approached when contract renewals would or, more likely, would not be made, these must have been part of Stegner's own experience. Nor does he portray everything as wine and roses. Under pressures such as these, bitter rivalries and feuds flourished even more, if possible, than they do in today's academia, and Stegner can be pretty funny about these, ruefully so, when he wants to be.

But his major characters, Charity and Sid, Sally and Larry (who narrates the story), however fictional they may be, are achingly real and very believable. Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin in the thirties, where Sid and Larry are on their first teaching assignments, Charity and Sally both pregnant, they begin the start of a deep, lifelong, loving friendship.

On the surface they have little in common. Charity, as her name suggests, comes from an old, deeply intellectual, but thoroughly warm-hearted New England family. Sid's father despised anything but money-making but left him a fortune with which to achieve whatever he wanted. Sally is an orphan of Greek background. Larry, who comes from the Southwest, has no money at all, but he will make it first, selling a story to the *Atlantic* in his initial teaching year.

Where Stegner is so convincing right from the beginning, is in giving us each of these four as individuals yet making perfectly clear the attraction that draws them all closer and closer as loving friends. He knows how to let us see, little by little, however, as Sally and Larry perceive it, what the blight of Charity and Sid's marriage is, and what it will come to mean in time to all four of them.

The jacket of *Crossing to Safety* displays a glorious picture of golden autumn leaves and a winding road. That sense of place is essential every step of the way here in terms of what it has brought into the lives of Charity and Sid, Sally and Larry. And it is marvelously conveyed by Stegner.



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There are scenes of New England that make one want to take off immediately. There is a wonderful sequence on Florence, Italy, that could only have been written by someone who had known and loved the place enough to wake his wife up in the middle of the night, as Larry does, and carry her to the window to see the carrier en route to market.

However deep and enduring their loving friendship, Sally and Larry, Charity and Sid, are mortals. As their relationship deepens, so does Sally and Larry's perception of the very real problems the other pair faces. A lot of things will happen here, but the most important of all remains Stegner's ability to keep us, his readers, caring.

Friendship has been a lonesome subject for a long time, yet could any of us really exist without it? Just try. Also try, some day, examining the background of that friendship. It may tell you quite a lot about yourself.

## FIERCE LOVE COMES TO HAUNT

**BELOVED**

**Toni Morrison**

**Alfred A. Knopf, $18.95, 275 pp.**

**Karen Baker-Fletcher**

I have never liked ghost stories. I either find them unbelievable or too sensational — too exploitive of a perverse morbidity that feeds on images of death and violence. I usually do not like contemporary attempts at slave stories for the same reason. Our media all too easily glory in the suffering of the victim and in the power of the oppressor. But Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* successfully avoids these traps. Morrison has authored a sensitive tale of an ex-slave woman named Sethe who loved her children fiercely as the best part of her own self. In Sethe's eyes, the ghost who has come to haunt her is her own dearly beloved daughter. What makes the ghost, Beloved, give a sense of authenticity to the novel is that she is not so much a ghost as she is a personification of the love and horror of the past.

Sethe is a tragic heroine. She is as much a living legend in her Ohio community of ex-slaves and abolitionist whites as Beloved is a living ghost. Her greatest flaw — loving her children perhaps too much — could be seen as other than righteous only in a world that denies her human rights. As Sethe's oldest friend Paul D. puts it: "For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her own children she had settled on to love."

In the eyes of the sheriff and the townspeople, Paul D. is right. Sethe is known as the woman who killed her baby daughter when her former master, Schoolteacher, tracked her down to take her and her children back into slavery. She served time in jail, nursing at her breast her youngest daughter, Denver, who is now ostracized by her peers and is also haunted by the past. Indeed, the very house Sethe and Denver live in, "124," is avoided by their neighbors because of the haunting that goes on there.

The characters in *Beloved* spend much time wrestling with the ethics of Sethe's act. Her ex-slave peers well understand the social conditions that led her to attempt to take her children's lives and to successfully kill one. But they condemn Sethe's pride and her self-justifying attitude. In their view, her worst offense is not the act she has committed but her response to it.

The novel provokes us to ask: Exactly what is Sethe's crime? Is it that she has murdered her own child? Or is it that she feels right in doing so? What constitutes a sinful act or a loving act in an inhumane society? Has Sethe committed any crime at all? In Sethe's mind, she has saved Beloved from something far worse: "That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to


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mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up."

I find myself asking: Why did Morrison write *Beloved?* As a black woman, I can imagine my grandmother — who never likes this kind of story — asking the same question with a tone of disapproval. Shouldn't parts of Afro-American history be left behind and safely buried? *Beloved* is the kind of story that some black mothers, as well as white ones, would like never to be told. What good could possibly come out of telling it? Whether or not *Beloved* should have been written is an ethical question in itself.

Morrison is not insensitive to this dilemma. Sethe herself finds it difficult to confront the past at full face and Denver has trouble hearing it. Morrison allows Sethe's story to emerge in bits and pieces with the help of a full cast of characters and an intimate narrative voice that speaks with an interior knowing. It is only when Beloved appears that Sethe begins to tell her "rememories." Beloved draws Sethe out gently at first, asking her to talk about her "diamonds." Gradually, Beloved becomes more and more demanding, accusing Sethe of leaving her behind. Morrison shows artfully that the past, for better or worse, can not — indeed *will* not — be left buried. At the same time, we learn from *Beloved* that we must not allow that past to take full possession of the present self.

Morrison was motivated to write *Beloved* after coming across an article in a nineteenth-century newspaper about a woman named Margaret Garner, who tried to kill her children to prevent their return into slavery. In writing *Beloved,* Morrison reveals that there is something far more than shame, scandal, or horror in this event. More important, a woman has fought to claim a basic human right. Sethe, like the nineteenth-century figure who stands behind her, dares to claim that her children belong not to the slaveholder but to herself. Through Morrison's rich and balanced prose, Sethe emerges as a woman of great courage.

If Morrison simply portrayed Sethe as a woman of great courage, she would seem unbelievable. But *Beloved* has a feeling of authenticity; not only because of the enormous historical detail that is embedded in the text, but because Morrison shows us Sethe greatly traumatized, and in need of healing. As the love between Sethe and Beloved threatens destruction on both sides, we find ourselves asking: How is Sethe going to come through this relationship intact? It is only when Denver reaches out to the women of her community that the "roaring" that has plagued "124" is brought to an end.

As in Morrison's first four novels, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *Tar Baby* (1981), the community itself is a character in *Beloved*. In *The Bluest Eye* we saw the community's concept of ugliness culminate in Pecola's being raped by her father and in her subsequent insanity. In *Tar Baby*, "night women" crowded into the room of the high-fashion model Jadine, challenging her to be a daughter — to take care of those who had taken care of her. Now, in *Beloved,* the community is alternately envious, curious, mean, loving. Out of ambivalent feelings for the prosperity of "Baby Suggs, holy," Sethe's preaching mother-in-law, the community participates in Sethe's "crime" by failing to warn her of the slave-catcher's approach. Just as Sethe needs to give up her pride and receive forgiveness in order to love herself, so must the community give forgiveness and come to her aid.

Religion has a more explicit place in *Beloved* than in any of Morrison's previous novels. Whether or not faith and grace can be held onto is an issue for the characters in this book. "Baby Suggs, holy" gives up on faith and grace, abandoning the Clearing where she preached, danced, and sang. When thirty women come before "124" to pray, Sethe feels as if the Clearing has come to her "with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words." For this community of women, "In the beginning there were no words. In the be-


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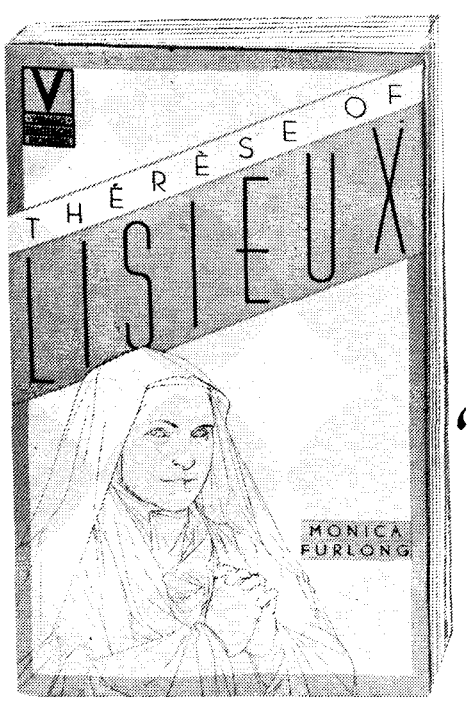


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ginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like.'' The text suggests that their religious heritage is older than Christianity and comprised of a mixture of traditions.

There are no saints in *Beloved*. Sharp lines are not always drawn between good and evil, black and white. The ghost that loves Sethe also accuses her. The race that enslaved her saves her from the gallows. The community that shuns her returns to heal her. Morrison's ability to draw us far into the interior of her characters' minds evokes a sense of the complexity of human good and evil. It is this same ability that will make *Beloved* appeal to a wide audience.

## UNLOCKING THE KEYS

**THE LIMITS OF THE PAPACY**
**Patrick Granfield**
**Crossroad, $15.95, 207 pp.**

**Peter Chirico**

It is a pleasure to read this clearly written, non-polemical, balanced, and ecumenically sensitive account of the limits to the authority of the pope in the church.

Granfield opens by describing the historical events of the post-Vatican II church under John Paul II which have raised questions about papal authority and its limits today: the general tendency of the pope to insist on complete obedience to magisterial teaching at all levels; interchanges between the papal magisterium and theologians resulting in various censures or restrictions; Roman regulation of religious communities; papal restrictions on political activities of individual religious and priests; papally ordered studies of seminaries and religious communities in the United States; and tensions arising from interchanges between Rome and individual bishops (e.g., Hunthausen) or groups of bishops. Despite the controversial contents of this first chapter, Granfield's account is a model of sobriety and objectivity.

After treating the theological and canonical claims made for the pope's supreme executive, legislative, jurisdictional, and teaching authority, Granfield examines (1) the historical attempts to limit the pope's powers, and (2) the recognized possibilities of restrictions on these powers — official, legal (natural law, divine law, and ecclesiastical law), dogmatic, and practical. (These distinctions tend to overlap one another.)

The remainder of the book takes up in some detail four factors in the Christian community which work to counterbalance the seemingly total papal supremacy. First, there is the collegial relationship of the pope to the episcopate in the conduct of the universal church. The

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teaching of Vatican II is compared with the church's experience of collegiality in the operations of the Synod of Bishops and of the episcopal conferences. Second, papal power is presented as limited by the divinely willed institution of local churches. The pope's function as the center of unity for all the churches is shown to operate in tension with the authority of each local bishop and with a legitimate concern for the working of the principle of subsidiarity.

Third, the sense of the faithful, as accurately described by Granfield, places limits upon what the pope can teach. Because the faith lives in the faithful, their reception of papal teaching is significant, and the possibility of non-reception and dissent within limits comes into being. Finally, the existence of other Christian communities called to oneness in the church suggests the need for (1) a primatial office dedicated to the unity of the whole church and for (2) certain reasonable limits to the authority of that office which will encourage other churches to accept the pope as the *de facto* primate. In this context Granfield speaks of several voluntary restrictions by the pope on the exercise of his authority.

A few comments. First, I think Granfield's treatment of the thorny question of public dissent is a model of balance. He recognizes that public dissent from the authentic teaching of the church by theologians in a scholarly forum, better called "non-assent" or "withholding assent," is permissible when presented tentatively with a diffidence and humility which safeguards the respect of the faithful for the magisterium's teaching. Such non-assent is to be distinguished from dissent which Granfield considers impermissible, namely either (a) one which involves the assertion that one's views are correct and those of the magisterium are in error; or (b) one which presents dissenting views to the general public as pastoral norms that any good Catholic may choose in preference to magisterial teaching. In discussing the practical handling of dissent, Granfield asserts that the magisterium should function as a court-of-last resort to sanction dissenting theologians only after extensive dialogue and the use of local authorities.

Second, I wish Granfield had treated some of the ancient historical background for papal authority more fully. In particular, I wish he had discussed the significant conclusions of modern biblical scholarship on the role of Peter in the New Testament as well as the different views on papal primacy that were reflected in the tension between the popes and the Eastern bishops in the first Christian millennium.

Third, I have doubts about Granfield's view that the practical exercise of the pope's juridical authority is virtually unlimited by the divine will and that the only way to get around the problems this unlimited authority creates for collegiality and for the ecumenical venture is for the pope to voluntarily renounce some degree of his powers. I fear voluntary renouncement because what is freely laid down can be freely taken up again, as Granfield himself acknowledges.

I personally hold that one does not need to interpret Vatican I's teaching that the pope has ordinary, universal, full, supreme, and immediate juridical authority in the church in such a way as to make that authority untouched *in practice* by genuine divinely established limits.

Rather, one can say, and I believe one must say, that the pope's juridical authority derives from the purpose and goal of his office and that its extent is limited by that purpose and goal. Thus, the pope has the right to intervene immediately in a concrete case in any diocese in the world *only if and when* such an intervention is necessary for building the unity of faith and communion. The pope simply does not possess an unconditioned authority that permits him to act as he pleases against the unity of the church. If one accepts this point of view, then what is required to meet the fear of a pope who acts arbitrarily and dictatorially is the detailing of a process which combines (1) the recognition of the Catholic doctrine that there is no legal authority in the church superior to that of the pope with (2) a creative strategy which practically enforces the divinely willed limits to the exercise of papal authority.

My personal views notwithstanding, I believe Granfield has given us an excellent treatment of a truly significant but formerly neglected theological problem.

## THE CARDINAL'S VIRTUES

### THE COLOR OF BLOOD

**Brian Moore**

**E. P. Dutton, $16.95, 182 pp.**

**J. V. Long**

Since a Pole was elected pope, relations around the world between the church — really, various local churches — and totalitarian political regimes of both the left and the right have been intricate. Cardinal Sin, in Manila, seemed to have tacit approval, at first, to facilitate the Marcos's removal. Different factions of the Nicaraguan church appear to offer support to each side in the Sandinista revolution. And Josef Glemp's voice in Warsaw, echoing the Vatican, continues to prod what Brian Moore refers to as The Power in his new book, *The Color of Blood*. The association with Poland is apposite, as Mr. Moore's novel is the story of the Roman Catholic cardinal-primate in an unnamed Soviet-bloc country and the precarious balance he must manage in his renderings to Caesar and to God.

Stephen Cardinal Bem is fifty-six years old and responsible for maintaining a more or less effective détente between his church and the state. Though squalor and injustice remain, he realizes that "this misery is now less prevalent than in those days we speak of with false nostalgia." He is a political realist and knows that more is to be gained for the church



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and his country through cooperation than by resistance. "There is no possibility of an extreme solution here. We *can* win further concessions from the government. We can force them to take steps to ameliorate the conditions under which our people live. But only if we act responsibly, and at the proper time. That is the Holy Father's position, as you well know."

However, pockets of radical resentment exist within his flock. There are men and women who see the cardinal as a collaborator, and who determine that he has reached accommodation with the government as a means of securing his own position and security. These "dissidents" manipulate any available source — patriotism, anti-Communism, religion — to legitimate their agenda and are prepared to employ very modern means to recover for themselves their ancient homeland.

In order to incite a confrontation with the government, and to reassert "the national will," a reactionary cadre of clergy and laity, led by two renegade bishops, intend to use a religious commemoration with strong nationalistic overtones as a catalyst for a call to arms. Since Bem would never sanction such an effort, and indeed could thwart it, he must be removed from the scene temporarily and in such a way that it seems as if the government is detaining him. Thus, not only is he silenced, but such a gratuitous insult against the church would presumably fuel the ardor of rebellion. Consequently, the cardinal is kidnapped by Catholics more Catholic than, well, the cardinal.

The real nature of his danger doesn't occur to Bem at first; being picked up by Security Police is capricious but not unprecedented. However, provided with an opportunity, he manages to foil his captors. In making his escape variously by hiding and journeying forward, by depending for help upon both allies and adversaries, he becomes aware of the complexities of the plots in which he is enmeshed. Not only must he outmaneuver the right-wing of his own church, he must also address the government's nerves in the face of the anticipated disturbances. To re-position himself in time to deflect the ill-conceived conspiracy (foreseeing the bloody disaster that would follow such an uprising) he builds an impromptu coalition that, in order to succeed, must placate the prime minister and the ubiquitous Security Police. In the end, he recaptures his pulpit and exerts his authority.

The book is not long, and the story moves with deliberate speed. But despite the intensity of the plot, Bem's character is the real focus of the novel. Spiritually, he is an innocent. As he faces his odd trials he consoles himself with disarming simplicity. "To suffer in Jesus' name. That is now my fate and I must give thanks for it. My task is to serve You." He suffers scruples, yet he remains confident in humility. "O Lord, You have chosen me for this task. I have been blind to many things. My intellect is weak. I have not seen how many-sided is this world in which You have placed me in a position of trust. . . . I ask You to guide me now, to give me that strength and intelligence that I have failed to find in


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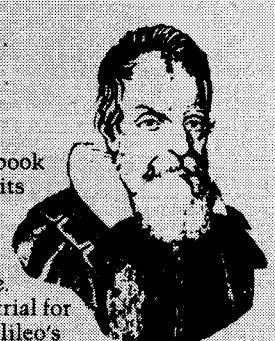

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myself." Cardinal Bem embodies virtues that are barely named anymore, and his political engagements involve, not so simply, the same, shrewd practice of virtue. He understands it, finally, as an extension of his priesthood. *The Color of Blood* forcefully describes Bem's fidelity to his vocation.

## ATTENTION MUST BE PAID

**AN AMERICAN CHILDHOOD**
**Annie Dillard**
**Harper & Row, $17.95, 255 pp.**

**Samuel Hazo**

Two things are revealed in this personal reminiscence by Annie Dillard that say much about why she writes as she does. One is that she drew as a child, drew sketches of a baseball mitt, a shoe, faces of people from memory. It inculcated in her a sense of responsibility for her own perceptions, and this sense was tinged with a sense of almost religious gratitude. "Noticing and remembering everything would trap bright scenes to light and fill the blank and darkening past which was already piling up behind me. The growing size of that blank and ever-darkening past frightened me; it loomed beside me like a hole in the air and battened on scraps of my life I failed to claim. If one day I forgot to notice my life, and be damned grateful for it, the blank cave would suck me up entire."

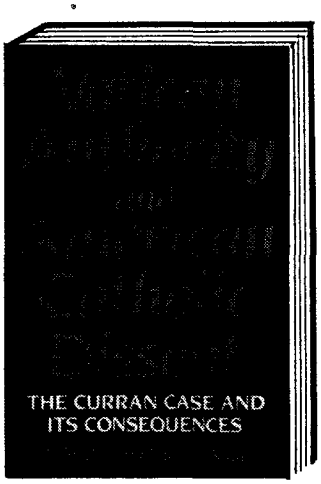
The other quality in her highly focused style as a writer may have grown out of the fact that she was the proud owner of a microscope as a child, and she used it to examine a specimen of her own blood, her urine and, finally and triumphantly, an amoeba. These things may seem trivial, but they are, I think, indicative of an identifiable strain that runs through all her work. She is a writer to whom minutiae are important, as they certainly are to an artist and a microscopist. She notices and describes the texture of human skin, the hair on that skin, the follicles out of which the hairs sprout. She even concentrates on a single hair. She is someone on whom very little is lost, and, as her reportage from China revealed in *Encounters with Chinese Writers*, this is as much of an asset to an essayist or memoirist as it is to a reporter.

The city in which Annie Dillard (born Annie Doak) grew up was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A good deal of her book is devoted to her delineation of what it meant to be part of that stratum of Pittsburgh Presbyterian society that was at one time (and still is, by and large) the economic power base of the city. Not that her family was affluent. Judging from her own admissions and descriptions, she was raised in a middle- to upper-middle class neighborhood, went to a private school for girls, and was something of a tomboy — playing baseball, wanting to play football, throwing ice-balls at passing cars (she was caught once, memorably), smoking cigarettes like a truant in high school, dating the boys in her stratum. These facts are interesting but not of crucial importance to the development of Dillard as a writer, and this book, it must be remembered, is finally the autobiography of a mind, not simply an autobiographical reminiscence.

The writer in her began to grow when she discovered the Carnegie Library in Homewood, when she browsed around the Museum of Natural History in the Carnegie Institute (now re-christened simply The Carnegie), when she, in her own way, rebelled in order to discover herself. Cumulatively, each of these things opened her to the sheer joy of living.

What can we make of the inexpressible joy of children? It is a kind of gratitude, I think — the gratitude


WHAT NEXT?

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> of the ten-year-old who wakes up to her own energy and the brisk challenge of the world. You thought you knew the place and all its routines, but you see you hadn't known. . . . The boundary of knowledge receded, as you poked about in books, like Lake Erie's rim as you climbed its cliffs. And each area of knowledge disclosed another, and another. Knowledge wasn't a body, or a tree, but instead air, or space, or being — whatever pervaded, whatever never ended and fitted into the smallest cracks and the widest space between stars.

I don't remember whether she wrote it or said it, but somewhere at some time Annie Dillard wrote or said that we have eyes primarily so that we can read. I have no doubt that she meant and still means it. She comes across as a voracious reader, and her outlook as a reader has the same wonder and honesty as her outlook as an observer of the natural world and its varied populations, i.e., human, animal, botanical, and mineral. And she has the strength of her rejections. She thought *The Education of Henry Adams* was "awful," and she thought the same of Joyce's *Ulysses* and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. That she was just a young girl when she read these works might explain her antipathy, but still she knew what she liked and didn't like. For a writer that is as important as talent itself.

What impresses me most about Dillard's work, whether I find myself agreeing with it or not, is her casual discard of an insight, a kind of imaginative throwaway. These are among her best sentences. In an earlier work she wrote: "Cruelty's a mystery and a waste of pain." Now that's a statement; it's one of

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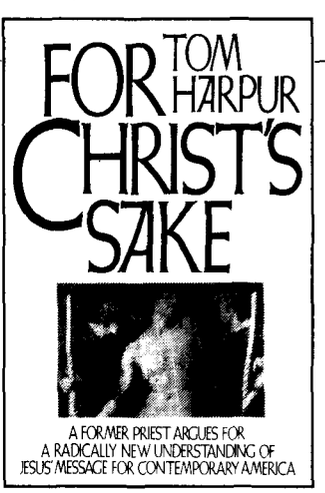
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those lines that it is impossible to forget. There are not as many of those lines in this book as I would have liked, and occasionally some of the minutiae seem to become ends in themselves (not the world in a grain of sand but just a grain of sand), and the last chapter with its rhapsodic nostalgia is a chapter that could have been left out (the book could have ended on page 150 and finished stronger, in my opinion), but these are personal quibbles that I may eventually come to withdraw. The important thing to say is that this is an honest book, a book where the writing is really written. And where the talent and the love of her subject converge, as they do in the superb chapter on her mother, Annie Dillard is the best possible Annie Dillard. The convergence occurs elsewhere as well. For that she needs to be praised, or, as we say in Pittsburgh, she needs praised.

## CONDEMNED TO MORAL LONELINESS

**SIMONE WEIL**
A MODERN PILGRIMAGE
**Robert Coles**
**Addison-Wesley, $17.95, 170 pp.**

**FORMATIVE WRITINGS: 1929-1941**
SIMONE WEIL
**Edited and translated, D. McFarland & W. Van Ness**
**University of Massachusetts, $30, 289 pp.**

**Eric O. Springsted**

"Such a course is to condemn oneself of a certainty to moral loneliness." This, according to Robert Coles, is the "unforgettable phrase" Simone Weil "used to describe what happens to someone who decided to scrutinize society so closely." Weil, he continues," spells out what that 'moral loneliness' means — that one will incur enemies all over, that those in positions of power — 'servants of the existing order' — will be critical and punitive. The personal dimension of these words is clear; she foresaw the high costs of her own vision."

There is a key to Robert Coles's biography of Simone Weil that he himself provides in an article written four years ago, an essay he thought, at the time, would be his last on Weil. He wrote then that the very availability and sum of Weil's writings seem to "offer ample evidence that there is nothing that the Western haute bourgeoisie . . . can't take for granted, dip into now and then . . . even on one or another rainy day feel immensely drawn to, though not in such a fashion as to jeopardize a quite comfortable life." This is a personally heeded warning for Coles; it is also a key and warning to the reader who might otherwise expect either sentimental adulation from Coles the admirer or the clinical arrogance of "explaining Weil" by a noted psychiatrist.

Coles's approach to Weil is a process of discovery in which he attempts to take her life and writings seriously, including their idiosyncrasies. His chapter on her hunger is an excellent example. All her life Weil ate little and often refused food; in the end this contributed to her death from tuberculosis. Many commentators have argued she was self- destructively anorexic. This obsession with food, they believe, is confirmed by her metaphorical use of food throughout her writings.

Coles goes about the subject differently. Anorexia, he notes, does not seem an accurate clinical diagnosis (Weil, for example, had a lifelong habit of slight eating, unlike anorexics who develop the habit suddenly). What does seem to be the case, he shows, is that Weil demonstrated an incredible will to pursue a higher good to which eating played only a secondary role. She would only be satisfied with the Great Feast; food, therefore, was the metaphor of the spiritually hungry. Physical hunger seemed to remind her of spiritual hunger and spurred her to pursue her spiritual goals with greater ardor. Uncommon, yes; morbid, perhaps; but at least striking when compared to those of us who after a hard day of lecturing and preaching on the good have worked up an appetite only for a really good Burgundy.

The picture of Weil that emerges from Coles is one of a committed moralist uncompromising in her attempts to see life clearly in moral terms and undaunted by the personal cost of such a search. This is, not only accurate to a degree most presentations of Weil have not been, but also allows us to see her religious life, too often described and dismissed as "mystical," as the outcome of that moral commitment. This picture ultimately makes her life a challenge to others.

The challenge can be seen particularly in two areas. The first is her religious sensibilities, often presented in striking sexual metaphors resembling the effects of an aberrant psychology, easily ignored by more balanced people. Yet Coles shows these attitudes come from a deep desire for human fulfillment of an intensity only the erotic can describe. In a moving passage, he draws upon an interview with a dying prostitute in Brazil who often expressed herself similarly. What emerges from that comparison is the degree to which the human spirit needs grace to live without resignation and how much that grace can be loved in bitter circumstances.

Weil's spirituality is therefore a challenge to the depth of ours, we who have not really suffered much humiliation at all. Additionally, Weil offers a challenge in her critique of intellectual idolatry. She is often criticized for being naive and idealistic about workers. But Coles lets us see that her concern for workers is also a criticism of the arrogance and idolatry of intellectuals who facilely sympathize with workers without really becoming involved in their lives. Thus what may be most important about Weil is not so much her schemes as such, but her clearsightedness about intellectuals. After all, she wasn't writ-



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ing to workers but to those who controlled them.

Weil clearly had her faults. Often her writings are dramatic and her social solutions dangerous in the wrong hands — which might be any hands. She had a particularly unattractive and hostile attitude towards Judaism, her own background. This attitude is partially explained by her dislike of numerous parts of the Old Testament such as the book of Joshua. However, unlike her treatment of any other religion, she never sought to revise her reading of Judaism or to see if it actually corresponded with Jewish self- understanding. This is an incredible blindspot. It is all the more incredible in that she rarely took anybody's opinion as settled on anything; yet she accepted certain French anti-Semitic opinions without much investigation. The flaw is plain and yet mysterious because it stands for an attitude that Weil found reprehensible and tried to eradicate in her life.

Coles's biography is, in the end, a marvel of taking his subject seriously. But perhaps the best way of putting his treatment is that it could not have appeared much earlier since it is the result of many years of thinking through Weil's life and writings. One can sense how much of the author's life is seriously focused in it. To have written this book any earlier would be to have spent less thought.

If Coles's book is one that appropriately appears forty plus years after Weil's death, so also is Van Ness and McFarland's edition of a number of previously untranslated Weil essays. These are not the first writings with which one should begin to read Weil if one wants her mature judgment. However, they are crucial for any real understanding of her. The title, *Formative Writings*, is an apt one since the contents of this volume are essentially writings which mark beginning and transition points in Weil's thought. Included are her diploma thesis, "Science and Perception in Descartes," which is important for understanding her beginnings as a serious philosopher; "The Situation in Germany," a series of ten articles Weil wrote on Hitler and Communist politics in Germany during 1932-33; and "War and Peace" charting Weil's changing position from pacifism to the recognition of the inevitability of World War II and her arguments to fight that war as a moral necessity (but to fight it as a moral force, not just as a force).

But perhaps most important of all is the "Factory Journal" which is the personal record of the year Weil spent in three Paris factories doing piecework. That experience marked what is perhaps the most important turning point in Weil's life; to have the record of it in English is an invaluable benefit, especially since its fragmentary and idiomatic qualities make it difficult even for those who know French. The translation of all the pieces is accurate and well reflects Weil's original French. To have these writings now and Coles's biography does indeed underline the editors' suggestion that writing and publishing in Weil studies has entered a new era.

## CORRESPONDENCE

*(Continued from page 610)*

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